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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE BALANCER POLICY REVIEWED FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVE OF THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE: TOWARD  
A MATURE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE**

by

Jihoon Yu

December 2006

Co-Advisors:

Edward A. Olsen  
Tuong Vu

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**THE BALANCER POLICY REVIEWED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE  
ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE: TOWARD A MATURE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE**

Jihoon Yu  
Lieutenant, Republic of Korea Navy  
B.A., ROK Naval Academy, 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
December 2006**

Author: Jihoon Yu

Approved by: Edward A. Olsen  
Co-Advisor

Tuong Vu  
Co-Advisor

Douglas Ralph Porch  
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the viability of the South Korean balancer policy in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance and suggests directions in which the alliance should proceed. The balancer policy announced by President Roh in March 2005 implies that, if it is adopted, South Korea will play the role of a balancer between the regional powers in Northeast Asia. The so-called balancer policy has been a source of controversy since its announcement, as the pros and cons of South Korea's balancer role have been debated both at home and abroad. The balancer policy announced by the president as a national foreign strategy is worth consideration because it has provided South Korea with an opportunity to think about its future foreign policies in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Considering that the ROK-U.S. alliance has been a linchpin of South Korean foreign policy for the last half century and that the alliance has not only deterred North Korean aggression but has also helped to create a stable environment for economic development and democratic consolidation in South Korea, it is clear that any policy options which may deteriorate the ROK-U.S. alliance should be avoided. Whatever policy option that is adopted should contribute to the strengthening of the ROK-U.S. alliance by overcoming currently emerging frictions and mistrust between the two countries.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

During the last fifty-plus years, the Republic of Korea–United States alliance has been a cornerstone of South Korea’s foreign policy and a pillar of Northeast Asian security. The ROK-U.S. alliance has functioned as an effective security framework to deter North Korean aggression. In addition, it has helped create a stable environment for economic development, the consolidation of democratic values, and a free-market economy in South Korea. Though there has been intermittent friction and disagreements in the process, both countries have benefited from the alliance, which serves their various interests well. However, the alliance now faces a complex set of challenges. The changes in the global and regional strategic environment in Northeast Asia, the differing perceptions of South Korea and the United States of the threat from North Korea, and their other policy differences have produced tension and mutual distrust between the two allies. Moreover, a rising anti-American sentiment among the South Korean public is creating further obstacles for the alliance.

In this context, in March 2005, President Roh Moo-hyun declared a new foreign-policy strategy in which South Korea would play the role of a balancer in Northeast Asia, acting as a strategic mediator between the regional powers. This means that in the unstable situation in Northeast Asia, in which Japan and China are now competing for the leading role in the region and North Korea’s nuclear threats continue to exist, South Korea would serve as a geopolitical balancer for the peace and prosperity of both the Korean peninsula and the entire Northeast Asian region.

In recent months, the so-called balancer policy has been a source of controversy. Critics argue that the balancer doctrine is endangering the half-century-long alliance and that South Korea may be giving the impression that it will downgrade its ties with the United States. Those who support the strategy argue that South Korea should take the initiative in bringing about regional peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. Given these issues, can the balancer doctrine be an appropriate national foreign strategy for South Korea, especially in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance?

Though there are pros and cons, the balancer policy announced by President Roh Moo-hyun as a national foreign strategy is worth considering, because the controversy over a balancer has provided South Korea with an opportunity to think about its future foreign policies in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Since the end of the Cold War, Northeast Asia has been unstable because of the competition between China and Japan to create regional hegemony and the imminent issue of the North Korean nuclear threat. Given these circumstances, South Korea should pursue a balanced and practical form of diplomacy, objectively assessing the unstable situation in the Northeast Asian region. In particular, South Korea must realize that, for more than half a century, its foreign policy has been based on the ROK-U.S. alliance. Thus, South Korea must rethink the implications of the balancer doctrine in regard to how it might alter the relationship between the two countries. If the balancer policy is a concept that would not work well with U.S. interests, its successful realization will be impossible. In a worst-case scenario, the situation might undermine the foundation of the ROK-U.S. alliance. A change in the relationship between the two allies could also widen the gap between their perspectives on how to solve the nuclear issues posed by North Korea. And for South Korea, a peaceful resolution of North Korea's nuclear problem must be an important component of any successful foreign policy.

Thus, by examining the appropriateness and possibility of the balancer doctrine as a national strategy from the perspective of the ROK-U.S. alliance, we can investigate and suggest the roles South Korea should play in helping create a peaceful and cooperative regional order based on its longstanding relationship with the United States.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. PURPOSE**

Over the past half century, the Republic of Korea's alliance with the United States, a pillar of Northeast Asian security, has been a cornerstone of South Korea's foreign policy. The ROK-U.S. alliance has served as an effective security framework not only to deter North Korean aggression but also has helped create a stable environment in South Korea for economic development and democratic consolidation. Despite intermittent friction and disagreements over some issues, both countries are aware that the alliance continues to serve their national interests effectively. Currently, however, the alliance faces a complex set of challenges. Changes in the global and regional strategic environment of Northeast Asia, a ROK-U.S. perception gap over the threat from North Korea, and policy differences have produced tension and mutual distrust between the two allies. And a rising anti-American sentiment among the South Korean public is creating further obstacles for the alliance.

In this context, in March 2005, President Roh Moo-hyun declared a new foreign policy strategy, according to which South Korea would play the role of a balancer in Northeast Asia by acting as a strategic mediator between regional powers.<sup>1</sup> This implies that, in the current unstable situation in Northeast Asia – with Japan and China competing to play a leading role in the region and given the existing nuclear threat from North Korea – South Korea intends to act as a geopolitical balancer for peace and prosperity not only on the Korean peninsula but also in Northeast Asia as a whole.

However, this so-called balancer doctrine has been a source of controversy. While critics argue that the balancer doctrine has shaken South Korea's half-century alliance with the United States and may be giving the impression that South Korea is downgrading its ties with the United States, those who support the new strategy argue that South Korea should take the initiative in bringing about regional peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> This declaration was made during his speech at the ROK 3rd Military Academy in March 2005.



Given these concerns, this thesis addresses a central question: Is the balancer doctrine an appropriate national foreign strategy for South Korea, especially in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance? The purpose of the thesis is to analyze and evaluate whether a balancer role is appropriate and feasible for South Korea as a viable national strategy. The thesis will also suggest a more desirable foreign policy for South Korea, which focuses on the ROK-U.S. alliance.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

Though there are pros and cons to South Korea's role as a balancer, the balancer policy that President Roh Moo-hyun announced as a national foreign strategy is worth pondering, because the controversy over the balancer role provides an opportunity to think about potential future foreign policies for South Korea. The end of the cold war created an unstable situation in Northeast Asia, marked by competition between China and Japan to create regional hegemony and, most recently, a North Korean nuclear test.

South Korea should draw a roadmap to pursue a balanced, practical form of diplomacy that objectively assesses the developing situation. In particular, considering that, for more than half a century, South Korea's foreign policy has been largely based on the ROK-U.S. alliance, the government must carefully rethink how the balancer doctrine might alter that relationship. If the balancer policy is a concept that is not compatible with U.S. interests, a successful realization of the balancer policy will likely be impossible. In a worst-case scenario, it may even undermine the foundation of the ROK-U.S. alliance. And any change in that relationship would also likely widen the gap in their diverse perspectives on possible solutions to the nuclear issues posed by North Korea. For South Korea, a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem is an important component of a successful foreign policy.

Thus, in this thesis, by examining the appropriateness and possibilities of the balancer doctrine as a national strategy, we also investigate the roles South Korea could play in helping create a peaceful, cooperative regional order based on its longstanding relationship with the United States.

## C. EMERGENCE OF A BALANCER POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA

### 1. Historical Context

In a series of speeches recently, South Korea's president, Roh Moo-hyun, unveiled a new foreign-policy doctrine, declaring that Korea must play the role of a balancer in Northeast Asia so that tensions do not revive and escalate. The balancer policy announced by the government implies that South Korea could serve as an honest broker both between China and Japan and between the United States and China. Thus situated, policy-wise, between two big powers like China and Japan and facing a bitter rival, North Korea, the South Koreans, in spite of their growing economic clout, are viewed in Asia as just another political pygmy in the pocket of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

However, thanks to South Korea's rise as one of Asia's most vibrant democracies, its growing cultural influence in the region, and post-Cold War global transformation, causing analysts to describe it as a "soft regional power," perceptions are changing rapidly. In other words, many consider that South Korea can play a much more innovative and pivotal role in this region than ever before by means of soft power.<sup>3</sup> They also explain that this is possible because South Korea today poses little threat to any of the other countries in the region, and it is often easier for a smaller power to work for peace and stability than for larger powers that have much higher stakes.

South Korea's role in recent years as a moderating force in the region is a significant change in the geopolitical equations of Northeast Asia, historically a region of great power rivalry, military build-up, and deep distrust. As the region's third-largest economy and a well-respected diplomatic player, and as a peaceful nation throughout its history that has harbored no intent to dominate others, South Korea commands enough

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<sup>2</sup> "Historically, we Koreans have lived through a series of challenges and have responded to them. Having to live among big powers, the people on the Korean Peninsula have had to cope with countless tribulations. For thousands of years, however, we have successfully preserved our self-respect as a nation as well as our unique culture. Within the half-century since liberation from colonial rule, and despite territorial division, war, and poverty, we have built a nation that is the 12th largest economic power in the world," See President Roh Moo-hyun's Inaugural Address, "Policy for Peace and Prosperity," Ministry of Unification, February 25, 2003, accessed at ([www.unikorea.go.kr](http://www.unikorea.go.kr)), Last accessed March 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The term "soft" is meant to show that South Korea's power does not come from "hard" military or economic might but the country's good image stemming from democratization of domestic politics, export of ideas and popularity among the people in the region, See Satya Sivaraman, "South Korea wields soft power," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, July 21, 2005, accessed at (<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=31101>), Last accessed March 2006.

“soft power” and is well qualified for a bigger role in promoting regional cooperation and development.<sup>4</sup> It argues that a balancer policy orientation will prove visionary and invaluable for a region that is ridden with potential great-power conflicts.

A major problem in big-power relations in the region lies in their mutual suspicion and misunderstanding. A regional peace and security structure has to be established to ensure long-term stability. In this situation, it is asserted that South Korea’s role as a balancer is significantly positive and helpful for building trust and confidence among major powers in the region.

Furthermore, the government argues that South Korea’s role as a balancer has been more and more evident at the recent six-party talks aimed at dealing with North Korea’s nuclear weapons problem.<sup>5</sup> While in the past, as a U.S. ally, South Korea would strongly criticize both North Korea and China, it has now moved closer to China and helped tone down hawkish U.S. positions that could lead to devastating conflict in the region.

Yet another factor that is helping the image of South Korea as a balancer in the region, strangely enough, is the sudden escalation in tension between Japan and China.<sup>6</sup> While Japan worries about China’s rise as an Asian superpower, China sees Japan’s movement for rearming with U.S. backing as a serious threat. In this context, the government insists that South Korea can emerge as a balancing force for peace between the two, despite being a much smaller power. South Korea as a friend of both the United States and China can play an important role in removing suspicions and starting a meaningful dialogue to settle the historical problems of this region.

To summarize, the balancer policy can be understood as one of the positive and innovative national strategic options that the South Korean government has tried to

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<sup>4</sup> Zhiquan Zhu, “South Korea as Northeast Asia’s Honest Broker,” *Asia Times*, April 20, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Ruediger Frank, “A New Foreign Policy Paradigm: Perspectives on the Role of South Korea as a Balancer,” Nautilus Institute Online, April 25, 2005, p. 2, accessed at (<http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0535AFRANK.html>), Last accessed February 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Some analysts explain that behind President Roh’s surprising policy announcement was his realization that Japan and China had begun to see which country would take the leading role in Northeast Asia in the 21st century, and his realization that Korea historically had often become caught up in struggles among the big powers that surrounded it, See Sekai Nippo, “Korea in Crisis: Korea as a Regional Balancer,” *World Herald Peace*, January 31, 2006.

pursue, based on the belief that South Korea is now on the threshold of a new role as a security balancer in the region, due to its unique capacity to dampen and smooth problems before they escalate. This is especially important considering the current situation in Northeast Asia, where the U.S. realignment of troops and its gradually planned reduction of the troops in South Korea, China's emergence as South Korea's largest trading partner and its expanding global influence, and Japan's heavy-handed foreign policy and its inflexibility in territorial and historical disputes with its neighbors are among the latest developments that South Korea must take into consideration when designing its foreign policy.

## **2. South Korea's Balancer Policy: Its Logic and Goals**

According to the South Korean government, the term "balancer" as defined in its foreign policy, does not mean a British-style balancer strategy, in which Great Britain sought to pursue hegemony in Europe by means of a balance of power in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The government admits that it is clear that South Korea's national strength is not strong enough to be able to exert a crucial and decisive influence on the Northeast Asian balance of power structure, just as Great Britain did in Europe. The South Korean balancer policy to promote peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia is not a British-style strategy designed to attain a power equilibrium, but an approach that seeks to establish a multilateral security and cooperative structure in the region by commencing confidence-building measures with all surrounding countries.<sup>8</sup>

The main intention and the goal of the South Korean balancer policy is that South Korea should take a leading role in improving regional peace and stability by overcoming conflict and mistrust that has been made deeply prevalent deeply by the struggles between regional powers to attain hegemonic status in Northeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> The core concept of a balancer policy calls for South Korea to promote efforts to transcend the remaining friction and disharmony and to create a new order on the basis of regional cooperation through open-minded diplomacy.

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<sup>7</sup> Moon Chung-in, "An Unavoidable Choice," *Daily News*, April 12, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Moon Chung-in, "An Unavoidable Choice," *Daily News*, April 12, 2005.

As such, this balancer policy is focused on the maintenance of regional peace through the establishment of a “balance and coordination of perceptions and values” to overcome the confrontation among states.<sup>10</sup> This also is a manifestation of South Korea’s determination to change Northeast Asia’s long history, which has been dominated by the hegemonic rivalry between China and Japan, into an order that vindicates co-prosperity and coexistence

In this regard, the government insists that the theory of a balancer is by no means an unattainable policy but a viable national strategy that is based on an objective awareness of history and reality. Why did South Korea become such a passive outsider and onlooker to the history that unfolded at the end of the nineteenth century, which culminated in the loss of its national sovereignty? Above all, the government explains that this resulted from South Korea’s lack of a proper sense of balance and the ability to objectively assess the situation at the time and to defend itself accordingly.

Armed with such a perception of history, the government intends to pursue a balanced and practical diplomacy, as well as a cooperative independent defense that contributes to a balance of power. In this sense, a balancer role is not a delusional notion, either. It is clear that South Korea cannot play the role of a hegemonic balancer, which Great Britain pursued in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, South Korea is no longer an insignificant and weak country. Moreover, South Korea now possesses the “soft power” needed to carry out the role of a peace balancer in Northeast Asia. As a peace-loving nation that has never invaded neighboring countries and serves as a bridge situated in the geopolitical center of Northeast Asia, South Korea is in a better position than any other country in Northeast Asia to selflessly and fairly initiate and play the leading role in promoting reconciliation and cooperative efforts in the Northeast Asian region.

With regard to the relationship with the United States, some experts explain that a balancer role would efficiently function to supplement the ROK-U.S. alliance more strongly. One of the policy goals of the government is to create a security community that can ensure a permanent peace in Northeast Asia, which is based upon a strong ROK-U.S. alliance. In other words, the objective is to develop the ROK-U.S. alliance into a more

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<sup>10</sup> Moon Chung-in, “An Unavoidable Choice,” *Daily News*, April 12, 2005, pp. 2-3.

comprehensive security mechanism, upon which to develop collective defense and multilateral security systems could be developed in Northeast Asia, similar to the arrangements in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Thus, they argue that a balancer theory in Northeast Asia is not intended to either break up the ROK-U.S. alliance or replace the triangular ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperative system in favor of an alignment with China and North Korea.<sup>12</sup> Rather, the balancer policy is a preventative diplomatic plan designed to forestall such an occurrence and to suggest directions for a new order of cooperation and integration in Northeast Asia.

In that context, some experts claim, a solid ROK-U.S. alliance is essential to such efforts, since cooperation and security in Northeast Asia will have a greater possibility of success if they are built upon a strong ROK-U.S. relationship.

To ensure national security amid the current fluidity, the government argues, South Korea must discard the chronic inertia of defeatism and the fatalistic trap of forever viewing South Korea as a victim in the struggle to achieve a balance of power. Peace and common prosperity will be assured in Northeast Asia only when the regional characteristics of discord and confrontation are converted into a relationship based on cooperation and integration. To this end, South Korea must further build up its national strength and beef up efforts to promote a more balanced diplomacy.

With globalization, the people of Northeast Asia share common aspirations. And South Korea certainly wants to grow and improve its status sufficiently to compete with the other advanced regions of the world. South Korea certainly does *not* want to repeat some of the mistakes it made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which caused it to fall behind other advanced regions. In this regard, therefore, some say that South Korea

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<sup>11</sup> The advent of a security community in Europe, in the form of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), was made possible by the existence of NATO, which was at the forefront of assuring the region's security. Rather than being weakened by the creation of the CSCE system, NATO has been stabilized and its role as a permanent alliance mechanism has been reinforced. Similarly, a solid Korea-U.S. alliance and Washington's active role in assuring regional peace are important prerequisites to the formation of a security community in Northeast Asia. Washington's positive participation and its exercise of capable leadership will contribute much to ensuring a bright future for the Korea-U.S. alliance, as well as the maintenance of peace and building of mutual trust throughout the region, See Moon Chung-in, "An Unavoidable Choice," *Daily News*, April 12, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> The Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, "The Korean Peninsula and Security Cooperation after Terrorism," *IFANS Review*, Vol. 10. No. 1, July 2002.

should make a clear-cut decision as to how it will build a neighborhood that will enable it to maintain prosperity and peace in the Northeast Asia region in the twenty-first century.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since the announcement of the balancer doctrine by the ROK government, controversy has emerged between two major groups: the conservatives and the progressives. The controversy focuses on two issues: whether a balancer policy is compatible with the ROK-U.S. alliance and whether South Korea has sufficient power to function as a balancer.

##### **1. The Conservatives**

As Sekai Nippo points out, the conservatives oppose the balancer doctrine, arguing that it will undermine the ROK-U.S. alliance, the foundation of South Korean foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> The balancer policy, they believe, may give the impression that South Korea is attempting to come out from under the U.S. shadow and play a neutral role in a region in which it straddles the fault lines of conflict.<sup>14</sup> They argue that breaking away from the ROK-U.S. alliance would isolate the ROK diplomatically and thus undermine South Korea's national interests. However, according to President Roh Moo-hyun, the new policy is based on the country's alliance with the United States.<sup>15</sup> This puzzles some experts, who wonder how South Korea can be both a balancer in the region and at the same time remain aligned with the United States.

In geopolitical terms, "balancing" refers to any attempt by lesser powers in a region to form alliances as a means to counterbalance America's global influence. South Korea's current cooperation with China has been interpreted as just such an attempt. This places South Korea somewhat at odds with its principal ally. The United States, which is also strongly allied with Japan, is increasingly outspoken against China's military expansion and its aggressive stance toward Taiwan. In particular, the United State's alignment with Japan situates it in direct competition with China for economic and military supremacy in the region. And, according to Nippo, China, to further its own

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<sup>13</sup> Sekai Nippo, "Korea in Crisis: Korea as Regional Balancer," *News World*, January 31, 2006, accessed at (<http://wpheald.com/articles/29/2/Korea-in-Crisis-Korea-as-regional-balancer.html>), Last accessed April 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Moon Chung-In, "An Unavoidable Choice," *Daily News*, July 6, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Kim Seoung-il, "President's Balancer Announcement at the Korea Third Military Academy," *Korea Herald*, March 25, 2005.

interests, is trying to use South Korea to curb Japan. Thus, from that perspective, the balancer policy may well play into the policy of China.<sup>16</sup> It is in this regard that conservatives insist that the balancer policy may give the impression that South Korea is trying to put a certain distance between itself and its traditional allies and friends, the United States and Japan, and is leaning more toward China.

Conservatives also express skepticism about South Korea's ability to be a balancer in terms of the critical military and foreign affairs in the region. They stress that the role of a regional balancer is dependent on two crucial factors: the balancer country's possession of the necessary power and capabilities, and other countries' recognition of that country's ability to perform a balancer role. The key question is: Does South Korea fulfill those two crucial factors? Conservatives worry that the balancer policy might simply facilitate a return of the wartime command authority to South Korea and a move to enhance its capability for self-reliant defense. This also would be contrary to the ROK-U.S. alliance, which has served well as an important pillar in safeguarding the Republic's defense and security. In sum, the conservatives declare with a strong voice that it is simply too soon for South Korea to stand on its own.

*a. The Conservative Position: Strengths and Weaknesses*

Those who criticize the balancer policy as an inappropriate national strategy base their arguments on the concepts of neo-realism. Considering South Korea's current capabilities, especially its limited power as compared to its neighbors, it does seem impractical for this country to act as a regional balancer. Nonetheless, while "the level of power" is an important factor in inter-state relations, it does not explain everything. Critics of the policy tend to focus on a concept known as "hard power" in assessing the country's capabilities.<sup>17</sup> And it is clear that, in terms of hard power, South Korea cannot play the role of a hegemonic balancer. Nevertheless, South Korea does

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<sup>16</sup> Sekai Nippo, "Korea in Crisis: Korea as Regional Balancer," *News World*, January 31, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> The term "hard power" refers to national power, which comes from military and economic means. It is used in contrast to "soft power," which refers to power that comes from diplomacy, culture and history. In neo-realism and realism, "hard power" is synonymous with "power." See "Soft Power," in Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, accessed at ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hard\\_power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hard_power)); ZHE Majie, "Role of Soft Power in International Relations," Shanghai Institute for International Strategic Studies, January 2, 2003, accessed at (<http://www.siiis.org.cn/english/journal/en20031-2/zhumajie.htm>), Last accessed March 2006.



possess the “soft” power,<sup>18</sup> which is also vital to the role of a peace balancer in Northeast Asia. Due to its location in the geopolitical center of Northeast Asia, South Korea is in a position to initiate and play a leading role in promoting reconciliation and cooperation efforts. However, if the ROK just remains content with its present position and makes no attempt to take the initiative, its foreign policies and its goal are not likely to bear much fruit. Furthermore, if acting as a balancer is not an appropriate national strategy, given the current situation, Conservative may have to suggest other more fitting alternatives rather than merely criticizing the president’s balancer policy.

## **2. The Progressives**

As Moon Chung In explains, the government and others who support the balancer policy argue that the policy’s main objective is to develop the ROK-U.S. alliance into a more comprehensive security mechanism, upon which collective defense and multilateral security systems could be developed in Northeast Asia.<sup>19</sup> They praise the policy as an indicator of the government’s willingness to take the initiative in terms of the country’s national defense policies. In Northeast Asia, where three countries – South Korea, China, and Japan – are destined to coexist in the same geographical region, progressives believe that a balancer policy means that South Korea will act as a mitigator in bilateral confrontations between China and Japan. Given the current situation in which tensions between Japan, which is trying to enhance its position in Northeast Asia by maintaining a strong alliance with the United States, and China, which is becoming a major economic and military power, there is a clear potential for an incident that could trigger tensions and a possible confrontation between the two countries. In that worst-case scenario, South Korea’s very survival could be jeopardized.

Historically, South Korea has often been involved in the struggles among the big powers that surround it. In this regard, the progressives suggest that South Korea should take the initiative in advancing and promoting regional peace and prosperity by overcoming the history of confrontation and enmity that, beginning in the late-nineteenth-

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<sup>18</sup> The term “soft power” is used in international-relations theory to describe the ability of a political body such as a state to indirectly influence the behavior or interests of other political bodies through cultural or ideological means, See “Soft Power,” in Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, August 20, 2006, accessed at ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft\\_power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_power)), Last accessed March 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Moon Chung In, “An Unavoidable Choice,” *Daily News*, July 6, 2005, pp. 2–4.

century pursuit of hegemony, has taken root in Northeast Asia. They acknowledge that South Korea's status in the international community has been elevated both through its economic growth and by the popularity of its culture in Japan and other Asian countries. It is this new status that is South Korea's "soft power." In that sense, progressives argue, the idea of South Korea as a balancer is not an anachronistic policy, but a viable national strategy based on an objective awareness of history and reality. As for its relations with the United States, South Korea's balancer role could supplement, rather than undermine, the ROK-U.S. alliance. In other words, they argue, the goal of South Korea's balancer policy is to create a security community based on a strong Korea-U.S. alliance that can assure lasting peace in Northeast Asia.

*a. The Progressive Position: Strengths and Weaknesses*

Though the progressives emphasize that the balancer policy would be based on an even stronger ROK-U.S. alliance, we must also consider how the policy is viewed from the perspective of the United States. If the United States agrees to South Korea's balancer policy, South Korea will have less difficulty fulfilling its balancer role in the region. The problem is, however, that the United States's views on the policy differ from those of South Korea. The United States and other powers do not seem to regard South Korea as sufficiently capable of mediating the conflicts in Northeast Asia. Christopher Hill, an Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, claims that U.S. experts, most of whom criticize South Korea's initiative as a move away from its traditional alliance with the United States, warn that it would be better for South Korea to stick close to the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Emanuel Pastreich is a rare exception. Pastreich argues that President Roh uses the term "balancer" in the Confucian sense of taking on the tasks of meditation and conflict resolution. Because South Korea is deeply committed not only to the United States, but also to China, and Japan, he reasons, it can serve as an ombudsman of sorts. Nonetheless, most American analysts continue to interpret the term as implying increased distance.<sup>21</sup> Given the fact that the United States's main interest in Northeast Asia is to

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Hill, "Hill on Korea's Role as Balancer," *Korean Thinking*, May 19, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Emanuel Pastreich, "Roh the Balancer: Roh Moo Hyun's Vision of Korean Politics and the Future of Northeast Asia," *Oh My News*, August 16, 2005, p. 11.

prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon through strong U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliances, the South Korean balancer policy does not really accord with U.S. interests. In a worst-case scenario, it might even harm the U.S.-ROK alliance, which has been the foundation of South Korea's foreign policy for more than half a century.

### **3. Summary**

While the conservatives' views regarding the balancer policy seem to be based on the concepts of neo-realism and are thus pessimistic, the progressives' views seem to be based on concepts of idealism and are therefore optimistic. The main difference between their views comes from the question, whether or not South Korea has sufficient power to even be a balancer. The conservatives say, no, it does not. And therefore, they criticize the balancer policy as a daydream that ignores reality. However, the progressives answer, yes, South Korea can function as a balancer, because it has "soft power."

In regard to the policy's effect on the ROK-U.S. alliance, the conservatives say that the policy does not accord with the alliance. However, the progressives argue that a strong ROK-U.S. alliance is what makes the balancer policy possible. The gap between these opinions seems wider than it actually is. Though the two sides react differently to the issue, they both also acknowledge the importance of South Korea's relationship with the United States. Both groups agree that any foreign policy – including the balancer policy – would, in effect, be worthless if it were not considered and understood in the context of South Korea's vital relationship with the United States. The problem is that, in considering the impact of the balancer policy on the ROK-U.S. alliance, neither group has proposed a concrete and detailed alternative. However, before South Korea can establish a more workable foreign policy, it must first understand the U.S. changing interests in Northeast Asia. If South Korea fails to analyze and understand the intentions of U.S. foreign policy, its endeavor to implement its own foreign policy in the region will face many obstacles. Thus, South Korea has no choice but to develop a national strategy that is based on the ROK-U.S. alliance with a clear vision for the future. South Korea's foreign policy must focus on lessening the differences and on greater harmony with U.S. foreign policy, so as, eventually, to further develop the ROK-U.S. alliance in keeping with the new challenges it now faces.

#### **4. Contribution to the Existing Literature**

To evaluate the feasibility of a balancer policy based on South Korea's alliance with the United States and to establish an appropriate foreign policy, the South Korean government must first investigate and have a comprehensive understanding of the United States's interests in and changing foreign policies toward all the countries in Northeast Asia. However, most of the existing literature is limited to explanations of these issues from a South Korean perspective. The U.S. perspective, as reflected in its foreign policy toward Northeast Asia, is seldom considered. What needs to be determined, therefore, is whether the United States and South Korea have any interests in common in the region. If not, it may be impossible for South Korea to successfully implement its foreign policy, whatever its content.

Thus, the first question this thesis considers is how South Korea's balancer policy covers issues of mutual interest to the United States and its policies in Northeast Asia. For example, one of the main goals of a balancer policy is to establish a regional security community in Northeast Asia much like the European Union (EU) under a slogan of mutual prosperity and coexistence. In this scenario, the concept of a security community could possibly be interpreted, however, as an attempt to exclude the United States. While South Korea is attempting to develop a future-oriented foreign strategy and to establish a Northeast Asian community in which it will take on the role of a balancer, the United States is focused on strengthening its alliance with Japan and containing China's movement toward economic and military supremacy. Given their diverse circumstances, South Korea's balancer policy does not seem especially compatible with U.S. interests.

In addition, there is the North Korean nuclear issue – an imminent threat to South Korea – and the attendant fundamental differences of perspective that exist between South Korea and the United States in solving this problem. If the balancer policy is perceived as an indicator of South Korea's aspirations for more autonomy from the United States, that will only make it more difficult for the parties involved to reach a peaceful solution to the prolonged nuclear weapons issue. Without a peaceful solution to that issue, South Korea's intention to use the balancer policy to take the initiative in lessening regional tensions will not be achieved.

As for the concept of power, it seems clear that South Korea does not have the necessary hard power to function as a balancer. In addition, even if the government supports and explains the feasibility of the balancer policy in terms of soft power, it is doubtful whether South Korea has sufficient soft power to function as a regional balancer. In sum, to evaluate the appropriateness and feasibility of South Korea's balancer policy, it must first gain a fuller understanding of the United State's' strategic concerns and foreign policy goals in Northeast Asia. South Korea's greater understanding of those concerns will help in its design of a more detailed foreign-policy roadmap aimed at further development of the ROK-U.S. alliance. As most analyses of the balancer policy so far approach and explain the issues involved from the South Korean perspective, this thesis is intended to contribute to the existing literature by evaluating the balancer policy from the perspective of the United States. This will also enhance our general understanding of the United State's' strategic concerns and current strategies in regard to Northeast Asia.

#### **E. METHODOLOGY: CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The main purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the suitability and feasibility of South Korea's balancer policy and to suggest optimal foreign-policy options for the development of a more mature and stronger ROK-U.S. alliance in the face of the new challenges of the twenty-first century. Within this context, Chapter I focuses on the background and goals. It discusses the emergence of the balancer policy suggested by President Roh Moo-hyun and its goals and potential meaning in the current environment in Northeast Asia.

Chapter II centers on, more particularly, the theoretical approach of South Korea's balancer policy. It evaluates the appropriateness of the concept of a "balancer" and its goals as suggested by the president and compares that to the traditional concept of a "balancer" found in international relations theories. The chapter also deals with the South Korean government's concept of soft power and its viability as a main means for the balancer policy in terms of international relations theories.

Chapter III analyzes the current security environment in Northeast Asia. It examines the foreign policy of each country, because those are the environmental elements that will either constrain or support and promote the realization of South

Korea's balancer policy in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance. The chapter mainly deals with the security environment surrounding the Korean peninsula, focusing on three actors – China, Japan, and North Korea – the most influential variables in the Northeast Asian security environment, especially in their relationship with the United States. The chapter will also examine how a changing U.S. foreign strategy toward Northeast Asia, based on either U.S. or common interests, has the potential to either match or clash with the South Korean balancer policy and the ROK-U.S. alliance. The chapter looks at the United State's' strategic concerns and its foreign policy on Northeast Asia since the end of the Cold War and the implications of those for the ROK-U.S. alliance. The chapter assesses the basic strategy of the United State's' foreign policies for each of the Northeast Asian countries, especially China, Japan, and North Korea. By assessing those policies, the thesis can better anticipate their impact on South Korea's foreign policy. The chapter also analyzes the main interests of the United State's' policies in Northeast Asia and the ways that its foreign strategy, motivated by those diverse interests, may interact with South Korea's balancer policy and affect the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Chapter IV presents recommendations for the future relations of the ROK-U.S. alliance. The chapter explains the importance and the necessities of some changes in the ROK-U.S. alliance for the future relations. In that sense, the chapter also suggests an optimal foreign-policy option by which South Korea could further develop its alliance with the United States. In that discussion, we emphasize the reasons that a strong alliance with the United States should continue to be the foundation of South Korea's foreign policy and suggest desirable directions that the alliance should move in future ROK-U.S. relations.

Chapter V concludes the thesis by emphasizing the ROK-U.S. alliance. The chapter explains and summarizes the various factors that could either constrain or promote the realization of South Korea's balancer role in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance. After evaluating the appropriateness and feasibility of the balancer policy in that context, this chapter concludes that the importance of a strong ROK-U.S. alliance is the most critical political option for South Korea.

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## **II. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE BALANCER POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR SOUTH KOREA'S BALANCER POLICY**

In this chapter, the appropriateness of the concept of a “balancer” and its goals as suggested by the president will be approached in terms of the traditional concept of a “balancer” found in international relations theories. In section A, B, the meaning of the ‘balance of power’ and the function, characteristic of the balancer will be mainly dealt with. In section C, the viability and appropriateness of the South Korea’s balancer policy will be evaluated by applying the traditional balancer concept. In section D, the South Korean government’s concept of soft power and its viability as a main means for the balancer policy will be mainly discussed in terms of international relations theories, especially based on the soft power concept by Joseph Nye Jr.

### **A. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: BALANCE OF POWER**

In international relations theory, there are many definitions of “balance of power.” Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines the term “balance of power” as “an equilibrium of power sufficient to discourage or prevent one nation or party from imposing its will on or interfering with the interests of another.” According to Joseph Nye in his book *Bound to Lead*, a “balance of power” depicts a situation where two states or two alliances have almost the same amount of power through the process of the power distribution. As for the concept of the power, power between states can be measured by comparison with one another.<sup>22</sup>

Based on the above definitions, basically, a “balance of power” can be explained as a distribution of power among states measured against the power of an opponent and each state within system must constantly assess each own power as well as potential opponents’ power.

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<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in terms of evaluating power, one has to consider actual and potential power. While actual power can be explained as an obvious entity such as a standing military force, potential power can be depicted as the power available in the future. Power again can be depicted as tangible and intangible. While tangible power is both countable and visible such as standing military forces, intangible power is invisible such as leadership, culture, and morale which can be explained well by the concept of soft power. See Joseph Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: Changing Nature of America Power*, Basic Book Press, June 1996, pp. 25,26,145; Barrister Harun ur Rashi, “Balance of Power and Global Military Spending,” *HOLIDAY*, June 22, 2006, accessed at (<http://www.weeklyholiday.net/2006/020606/inter.html>), Last accessed April 2006.



The main function and benefit of the balance of the power in international relations theory is that it can anticipate the counterbalancing actions and attempts through the changes in international power structure. For this reason, it is explained that the balancing procedure contributes to the maintenance of the stable relations between states. In general, a balance of power system functions efficiently under the situation where the alliances are fluid because they can be formulated or destroyed easily. If there exists a weakness in the concept of the balancer of power, it is the difficulty of measuring power.<sup>23</sup>

#### **B. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY: THE MEANING, FUNCTION AND CHARACTERISTIC OF A BALANCER**

Though diverse studies of the balancer's behavior in international relations seem to have deep origins and history, most of them are still full of conceptual ambiguity and competing theoretical and empirical controversies.<sup>24</sup> While the function of the balancer is generally clearly explained, the importance of the balancer's role to the balance of power system seems not to be clear. This is the reason why there is a division in the literature about the balancer concept between writers who believe that a balance of power system cannot be operated efficiently without the existence of a balancer, and other writers who argue that a balancer is not necessary and the balancer would eventually overturn a balance of power structure. For the first group, the balancer is regarded as the key element for a successful execution of the balance of power system. They argue that without the balancer the idea of a balance of power will not have any meaning. This is because it is only the existence of the balancer, which can contribute to the maintenance of the general equipoise that can ensure an actual or potential preponderance to the side prepared to maintain the status quo.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For further information, See "Balance of power theory: IR Paradigms, Approaches and Theories," Online Encyclopedia, April 1, 2006, accessed at (<http://encarta.msn.com>), Last accessed May 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Recent surveys of balance of power theory that also include discussions of contemporary international politics include G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002; John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate*, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002; Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> In Lerche's words, a balancer can be sustained only when a major state or bloc of states makes the preservation of the balance the major component of its policy. See Englewood Cliffs, N.J., *Realism and the Balancing of power: A new Debate*, Prentice Hall Press, 2002.

On the contrary, critics who do not emphasize the balancer's role in the balance of power system have a different point of view. A.F. Pollard and Henry Cralk argue, for example, that "a balance of power ceased to be true as soon as its adjustment is entrusted to anyone. It must either be maintained by its own equilibrium, or it is sustained only by the application of arbitrary force."<sup>26</sup> This view is supported by Kenneth Waltz, who argues that "the balancer concept stems from a distortion of balance of power theory, the distortion being an idea that if a balance is to be formed somebody must want it and must work for it."<sup>27</sup>

As such, the question of the importance of the balancer has generated different opinions from both critics and proponents in the area of the international relations theories. According to Organski, A.F.K. "There is no such thing as a 'balancer' and there never has been."<sup>28</sup> Norman Padelford and George A. Lincoln, by contrast, argue that, "in theory and practice any balance of power system, whether limited or global, requires 'balancers'."<sup>29</sup> While realists seem to interpret balancing behavior as an inevitable phenomenon of international politics, liberals generally seem to regard it as an avoidable characteristic of international society.

As seen above, the balancer theory has been controversial in International Relations theory from its birth. However, it is common concept, as Sheehan mentioned, that the balancer policy is one which any state can desire if the conditions are met, although few entities can fulfill its requirements. The basic function of the balancer is to prevent the occurrence of a permanent disequilibrium which can happen under the situation where one state or alliance is able to exercise a hegemonic power over the others.<sup>30</sup>

As Sheehan argues, in many cases, the role of the balancer is played by a state whose policy is focused on balance of power with efficient methods depending on the

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<sup>26</sup> A.F. Pollard, "The Balance of Power," *Journal of British Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, 1923, pp. 51-64.

<sup>27</sup> K. Waltz, *Realpolitik and Balance of Power Theory*, International Politics Press, 1959, pp. 33-42.

<sup>28</sup> A.F.K. Organski and J. Kugler, *The War Ledger*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> N.J. Padelford and G.A. Lincoln, *The Dynamics of International Politics*, New York Press, 1967, pp. 34-37.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*, New York Press, 1996, p. 65.

situation. Even if the balance of power system can be operated with all states involved in the balancing process, the balancer role has been generally and historically conducted by one state whose individual policy is decisive to maintaining a balance of the system. The operation of a balancer assumes the existence of an international system in which the balancer's coalition or cooperation with one state or alliance will be sufficient to affect the balance of power system. The balancer can keep the balance through its diplomatic pliability, shifting its support from one side to another, sometimes by using an ultimate method like military force if necessary.

### **C. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA'S BALANCER POLICY**

When one looks back on history, one easily notices that only some states have played the balancer role successfully with certain credibility. The balancer role can be conducted successfully when the balancer has its marginal power or balancing power which can affect the system. In a sense, for the balancer's influence to be maximized, the balancer should be successfully able to add a balancing power to one side, causing the decisive influence on the outcome. When the balancer can successfully exert a decisive influence with the marginal power by allying itself to one state or alliance, it can have enormous bargaining power with the state or alliance which it supports.

The main object of the balancer's intervention within the system is to maintain or restore the equilibrium within the system and this objective makes the balancer disregard all other considerations which are not suitable to accomplishing this goal. Due to this characteristic, the balancer can have neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies in international society. Perhaps, the balancer will only have a permanent interest to keep the balance because this is the characteristic and the main reason for the balancer's existence. The balancer can change its relationships with any states or alliances as a result of focusing on the permanence of its balancing strategy. This is why the balancer cannot afford to become identified with the policies of any of the states or alliances all the time with credibility. There cannot be any ideological solidarity to the balancer.

In this regard, it is hard to expect sincere trust from the balancer in terms of relationship with any state or alliance. The balancer should ignore past friendships and only react to present dangers and interests. In addition, some writers have also argued that the commitment to preserve the balance overrides the basic tenets of international law,

for example, injunction not to interfere in the domestic affairs of other states. Taken to its extreme, this argument could be used to justify the balancer's efforts to vehemently emphasize the animosities and divisions among the states making up the balance. However, in the long run, these kinds of behavior would drive the balancer into a situation where it cannot gain the support needed for the efficient performances of its role from the allies or a state that it supports at a proper time. In an extreme case, the balancer might be isolated within the system rather than functioning as a balancer.

As we have seen, there are several different approaches to and explanations of the balancer concept in international relations theories. Nonetheless, there also seems to be at least two commonly accepted concepts: that a balancer policy cannot be combined with an alliance policy, and that a balancer policy is only possible if a country has some power to influence the system. When the balancer has enough power to influence the system, the balancer's intervention is going to be decisive.

Even if there are differences in its degree depending on the characteristic of the alliances depending on the situation, in general, an alliance is founded on the basis of the mutually related policies through understanding and agreement. In other words, an alliance can firmly exist only when there exist commonly shared strategic goals and the similar system which reflects a common strategy of allies. In light of those factors, if South Korea pursues the role of a balancer, South Korea will not be able to keep a strong alliance with the United States because the United States, though it has been a friend, could become an enemy. It all depends on what South Korea decides to do, given the characteristics of a balancer as understood within international relations theory. Furthermore, the strategic goals of the South Korean balancer do not seem to avoid the conflict with the currently changing U.S. strategic interests.

In this regard, the intention of South Korea's balancer policy – that it be based on a strong ROK-U.S. alliance – does not make good sense because, as we have shown, balancer policies are not generally compatible with alliance policies. Furthermore, if South Korea continues to pursue a balancer policy, adopting common policy strategies with the United States will be difficult, if not impossible.

In regard to power, it is clear that, compared to its powerful regional neighbors, South Korea is the weakest. Currently, there is a general military expansion movement in all the neighboring countries. Thus, the practical problem for South Korea is that all of these countries are big powers that South Korea cannot be matched in terms of power. If South Korea tries to strengthen its military forces, its neighbors will react with an apprehensive, negative attitude. And that will eventually merely make the arms race between the Northeast Asian countries more drastic, creating an unstable environment.

The balancer policy is intended to make it possible for South Korea to choose its shifting alliances in keeping with its national interests. But these political calculations of power could also cause South Korea to become politically isolated from the rest of international society if South Korea's policy choice does not work as planned. The balancer policy could lead to a situation in which South Korea would put pressure on the regional powers over issues that are in the national interests of South Korea. However, it is doubtful that South Korea has sufficient balancing power – whether hard or soft power – to succeed. Things might change as South Korea intends, or the balance of power in Northeast Asia could remain completely unaffected by whatever South Korea decides to do. If the latter proves to be the case, then South Korea will experience a loss of credibility. In a worst-case scenario, South Korea may face political isolation from the international community. All in all, there seems to be a high possibility that South Korea has more to lose than gain by adhering strongly to such a foreign policy.

#### **D. SOFT POWER AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA'S BALANCER POLICY**

##### **1. Weakness of "Soft Power," Logically and Conceptually, for a Balancer Role**

The South Korean government has suggested a balancer policy that would function by means of "soft power." Thus, the government must believe that South Korea possesses sufficient soft power to perform the role of a balancer in Northeast Asia. The first question we must consider is, Is this true? Does South Korea have enough soft power to function as a balancer? In evaluating this, we begin with the definition of soft power found in international relations theory. What are the implications of that soft-power

definition for South Korea's balancer policy? Can it be applied to the South Korean case? And is the concept of soft power appropriate and applicable enough to be used as a means to implement the South Korean balancer policy?

"Soft power" is a phrase coined by Prof. Joseph Nye, former Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, in the mid 1980s to define a country's ability to pursue its goals by inspiring rather than intimidating others.<sup>31</sup> In general, while military and economic explanations are regarded as examples of hard power, soft power is explained and depicted as having certain cultural traits and values that can motivate other countries. However, soft power is different from hard power in that soft power –making others to want the outcomes that you want- co-opts people rather than coerces them.<sup>32</sup> In other words, soft power relies on one's ability to shape the preference of others. This is because the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible variables such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and policies that are seen as legitimate or as having moral authority.<sup>33</sup> According to Nye, a country's soft power comes primarily from three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad) and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).<sup>34</sup> When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies develop values and interests that others share, it increases the possibility of obtaining its planned outcomes.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, narrow values and local cultures are less likely to produce soft power. Based on these characteristics of soft power, Nye argues that soft power is an important factor to be considered when attempting to understand and explain the dynamic relations between countries in international society.

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, January 2004.

<sup>32</sup> This concept first introduced in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of America Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), Chapter 2. It builds on what Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz called the "second face of power." See their "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework," *American Political Science Review*, September 1963, pp. 632-642.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, January 2004, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, January 2004, p. 12.

Soft power is becoming an important factor and influences the relationships between countries, especially in this dynamic interdependent world where the cultural exchange between countries is developing. However, there are still difficulties and complexities in explaining and applying the concept of soft power, especially if it is to be used as a main method for a country's foreign policy. This is because the concept of soft power is controversial in its logic and theory.

Nye explains soft power by the concept of resources and attraction. According to Nye, soft power resources are assets that generate attraction. However, practically, it is hard to discern which asset is a soft power resource that produces attraction. It is also hard to conclude that some attractions will always generate desired outcomes, especially in particular cases. For the soft power to be used as a means of a country's foreign policy, the outcomes caused by the interaction between assets and attraction could be calculated and anticipated with certain accuracy and credibility. If not, the cost and time, which can be wasted in the process, might be enormous, damaging the entire country in an extreme case.

Of course, these ambiguities are not just a characteristic of soft power; such ambiguities can also be found in other forms of power. Nevertheless, due to these ambiguities, it is still hard to measure the level of soft power, not to mention the difficulties in discerning soft and hard forms of power in the real world.

For example, in the international community, economic strength can be transformed into either hard or soft power. One country can coerce other countries by means of economic sanctions. Especially, considering the current situation where every state is competitive in expanding its own benefit in economic relations with other states, a successful economy must be an important source of attraction to every state nowadays. However, while there is no doubt that a successful economy is an important source of attraction, in the real world, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what part of an economic relationship is made up of hard and soft power. In this sense, depending upon the situation, soft power seems to be too flexible a concept to be useful. Furthermore, even though there are some ways to measure the level of soft power, the question whether

soft power will produce the behavior that we want will depend on the context.<sup>36</sup> This makes it more difficult to explain and measure soft power, and sometimes, it is even confusing to tell soft power from hard.

In some ways, hard and soft power are closely related: both are methods that a person or country can use to affect the behavior of others. Both can either reinforce or interfere with the other.<sup>37</sup> While it is not always true, in general, when a country has a strong hard power, there is a high possibility that it can also exert soft power more efficiently because hard power can also create a myth of invincibility that attract others.<sup>38</sup> We find that, sometimes, countries are attracted to another country out of fear of its international invincibility based on hard power. For example, the intermittent nuclear threat from North Korea has had a big influence on South Korea, shaping the attitudes and life style of the people, and sometimes, even affecting South Korea's foreign policy.

In this regard, even though those who support it argue that South Korea can play a balancer role by means of soft power instead of hard power, it is doubtful how efficient South Korea would be in exerting soft power without the use of strong hard power as well. Those who argue for a soft-power approach apparently overlook or misunderstand the close relationship of the two types of power.

Some scholars and people in general who support the South Korean balancer policy and assert that South Korea has enough soft power to influence other countries, point to its current rising influence as an exporter of culture and entertainment to other countries as an example. This phenomenon is described as 'hallyu,' which means "the wave."

They argue that South Korea is emerging as a cultural leader in Northeast Asia.<sup>39</sup> Considering the recent situation, in which the popularity of South Korean culture such as

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Think Again: Soft Power," Foreign Policy: Yale Global Online, March 1, 2006, accessed at (<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=7059>), Last accessed May 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, January 2004, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> The size of South Korea's entertainment industry, which began attracting heavy government investment only in the late 1990's, jumped from \$8.5 billion in 1999 to \$43.5 billion in 2003. In 2003, South Korea exported \$650 million in cultural products, See "Soft Power: Korean Style," Davos Newbies, June 28, 2005, accessed at (<http://www.davosnewbies.com/2005/06/28/html>), Last accessed May 2006.



music and drama is rising, the so-called hallyu phenomenon indicates that, possibly, all the goodwill could make South Korea a much more perfect country for accelerating peace, not just on the Korean peninsula, but in all of Asia.<sup>40</sup> They seem to believe that South Korea became prominent as an exporter of culture and entertainment.<sup>41</sup>

It is true that aspects of South Korea's culture have long been popular in the Northeast Asian region. But it is doubtful whether we can conclude that this phenomenon can support the contention that South Korea has sufficient soft power to use as an efficient means of foreign policy.

Those supporters seem to treat soft power as simply popular-cultural power. They make the mistake of identifying soft-power behavior with the cultural resources that sometimes help produce it. The problem with this is that they confuse cultural resources with the behavior of attraction. For example, even though the North Korean dictator, Kim Jong Il, likes American pizza and movies very much, it is difficult to believe that this will affect his nuclear program. And we cannot assert that the United States has power over him based merely on this temporary phenomenon. What if, in a year, Kim Jong Il becomes tired of pizza and American movies? Does that mean that soft power will no longer affect him? If so, why should soft power be regarded as such an important factor in considering the relationship between countries in the international relations? Thinking so confuses resources with behavior. Furthermore, though culture may be one of the elements that constitute soft power, culture in the form of a probably temporary phenomenon like "hallyu" could disappear as time goes by.

In this regard, Joseph Nye argues that the resources of soft power should be understood according to the context, which is what determines whether or not power

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<sup>40</sup> Satya Sivaraman, "South Korea wields Soft Power," Interpress News Agency, January 15, 2005, accessed at (<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=31101>), Last accessed April 2006.

<sup>41</sup> South Korea's pop culture accounted for 1.87 billion U.S. dollars in revenue, in 2005, from film and TV program exports, merchandise sales and tourism related to hallyu.

resources produce a favorable outcome.<sup>42</sup> This factor is not unique to soft-power resources.<sup>43</sup> And, while it is true that popular culture is often a resource that produces soft power, it does not explain everything.

We must also consider that the effectiveness of any kind of power resources depends on the given context. In this regard, it is important to calculate and assess situations in which the relation between attraction and desired outcomes work together in a favorable way for the soft power to be effective. For example, popular culture will attract people and produce soft power much better in circumstances in which there are common traits between the cultures.<sup>44</sup> Of course, we cannot always say that only soft power depends on context. Nonetheless, it would be no exaggeration to say that soft power depends on context to a greater degree than other forms of power. Soft power also rests, more than hard power, on the existence of willing interpreters and receivers.<sup>45</sup>

It is doubtful that the soft power of South Korea is strong enough to attract other countries and overcome the differences in their political, social, and cultural context. If South Korea has sufficient soft power to overcome those differences, why does South Korea still conflict with countries such as China and Japan over historical issues? <sup>46</sup>

It should also be understood that some goals can be achieved only by hard power. North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il's attractions to South Korean culture such as "hallyu" does not seem to affect his decisions on developing the nuclear project. In this situation,

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<sup>42</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public affairs Press, April 12, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Having a larger tank army may produce military victory if a battle is fought in the desert, but not if it is fought in swampy jungles such as Vietnam., See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public affairs Press, April 12, 2004. p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, April 12, 2004. p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> South Koreans strongly challenged the treatment given to Koguryo (one of Korea's ancient three kingdoms, existed for 700 years ruled by 26 wise kings) in the papers of the Northeast Project, a government-funded organization established in Beijing in 2002 for the purpose of studying historical issues of Northeast China. South Koreans objected to the Northeast Project's assertions that Koguryo was merely a dependent regional authority of China. It is popularly assumed in South Korea that China intends to take Koguryo's heritage from Korea. The justification is understood to be that China was preparing a case for a preemptive territorial claim in the case of a North Korean collapse. See Mark Byington, "The War of Words between South Korea and China over an Ancient Kingdom: Why Both Sides Are Misguided," History News Network, September 6, 2004, accessed at (<http://hnn.us/articles/7077.html>), Last accessed May 2006.

hard power might be used more efficiently to force him to give up his nuclear plan by means of economic sanctions.<sup>47</sup> Considering the current unstable environment of Northeast Asia, in which regional powers struggle to obtain hard-power predominance, the concept of soft power suggested by South Korea does not have a persuasive logic to support the appropriateness of a balancer role.

Finally, we must also consider that soft power is difficult to use as a method to support a country's national strategy. The government can spend money on public diplomacy and public broadcasting, and though it can regulate the popular cultural in some ways, it cannot control popular culture forcibly to fit its own taste. This may be one reason that Joseph Nye mentions, "One of the key resources that produce soft power is mostly independent of government control." Of course, government policies can either reinforce or waste a country's soft power.<sup>48</sup> However, in general, the government cannot own soft power as much as it owns hard power because in most cases soft power resources are separated from the government and partly can only be used for its purposes. This is also why much of the soft power has been actively generated by the civil society within a state.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes there may be an occasion when soft power improved by civil society can conflict with the official foreign goals of the government. This is particularly true because private sources of soft power are gradually becoming more important in the global information age.<sup>50</sup> In this regard, the term "soft power" in international politics – particularly as one nation's main method for foreign policy – may not be desirable, because governments are not in full control of the soft power.

Any nation has its own options for extending influence throughout the world. It can be hard power or soft power or both. But soft power can produce antagonistic

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<sup>47</sup> As an another example, nor will soft power be sufficient to stop the Iranian nuclear program, though the legitimacy of the U.S. administration's current multilateral approach may help to recruit other countries to a coalition that isolates Iran. And soft power got nowhere in luring the Taliban away from al Qaeda in the 1990s. It took the U.S. military might to do that. But other goals, such as the promotion of democracy and human rights are better achieved by soft power, See Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Think Again: Soft Power," YaleGlobal Online, March 1, 2006, accessed at (<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=7059.html>), Last accessed June 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, April 12, 2004, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Think Again: Soft Power," Yale Global Online, March 1, 2006, accessed at (<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.articleid=7059.html>), Last accessed July 2006.

reactions from others. South Korean pop culture such as movies and music may be popular in some other nations, but we must also bear in mind that they do not necessarily depend on South Korea to shape their perspectives on larger and more important issues. A dominance of soft power may possibly result in resentment and ridicule if other countries feel their cultures are under attack. The spread of culture in itself seems be limited in its potential for resulting in a common understanding or peace.

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### **III. SOUTH KOREA'S BALANCER POLICY AND THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In Chapter II, the appropriateness of South Korea's balancer policy was evaluated theoretically according to the traditional definition balancer concept found in internal relations theories. In this chapter, we analyze, more practically, the current security environment in Northeast Asia. It is the environmental elements in the region, after all, that will either constrain or support and promote the realization of South Korea's balancer policy in terms of the ROK-U.S.

In section A, we will discuss the strategic environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula in light of the changing interrelationships between the key regional powers – the United States, China, Japan, and South Korea. Section B will deal mainly with the United State's' post–Cold War strategies toward Northeast Asia and their implication for the ROK-U.S. alliance. The section will also deal with the security environment surrounding the Korean peninsula, focusing on three actors – China, Japan, and North Korea – the most influential variables in the Northeast Asian security environment, especially in their relationship with the United States. Sections C and D will analyze the main interests driving the United State's' policies in Northeast Asia and the ways that its foreign strategy, motivated by those diverse interests, may interact with South Korea's balancer policy and affect the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Though the viability of a South Korean balancer policy remains controversial, there seems to be no disagreement about the need for South Korea's foreign policy to be based on the ROK-U.S. alliance. Furthermore, the establishment of a comprehensive roadmap could reinvigorate the alliance, especially in terms of its future role in Northeast Asia. Any plan should carefully consider and analyze all the factors that might affect the alliance, whether in a favorable or an unfavorable direction.

If the balancer policy pursued by South Korea contradicts or conflicts with U.S. policies and interests, it may well endanger the future viability and applicability of the

ROK-U.S. alliance. In other words, if the two nation's strategic objectives and visions for the future are not based on mutual common values, it will probably be impossible to find a common strategic role for the alliance.

Thus, it is necessary that the future strategic role of the alliance be planned by anticipating and analyzing the strategic objectives and concerns of all the countries in Northeast Asia. Only by doing so, can South Korea forge a consensus agreement as to a common alliance position and strategy and lay the groundwork for revitalizing the alliance in the face of the new twenty-first century challenges. If either South Korea or the United States should announce its foreign policy without objectively considering the other's strategies and interests that would likely only deepen the other's misperceptions. And the situation will certainly aggravate ROK-U.S. relations.

#### **A. THE KOREAN PENINSULA, THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE, AND THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

##### **1. Assessment of South Korea's Twenty-first-Century Strategic Environment**

At the end of the Cold War, although the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union disappeared, the collapse of the bipolar system did not guarantee a stable environment in the Northeast Asian region.<sup>51</sup> The geopolitical situation of the Northeast Asian region is unique for two reasons. First, Northeast Asia is the only region in the world where the interests of three major powers – the United States, China, and Japan – are closely interrelated. Second, a legacy of the Cold War is still evident on the Korean peninsula: it has been divided into South and North for more than fifty years.

Japan and China, the two main regional powers, continue to compete to upgrade their military capabilities. Thus, the situation on the Korean peninsula repeatedly experiences uncertain change. Currently, one of the most urgent issues in the region is the nuclear threat from North Korea, which skillfully fosters instability in Northeast Asia by its nuclear brinkmanship strategy.

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<sup>51</sup> William R. Keylor (Ed.), *The Formation of the Bipolar World in the Truman-Stalin Era The Twentieth Century World: An International History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 261-95.

a. *U.S., Chinese, Japanese and South Korean Interrelationships in the Region*

China is now exerting great endeavor to enhance its economic modernization, while Japan is raising its political and economic voice in the region as the world's second largest economy, following the United States, as well as a strong U.S. ally. Meanwhile, the United States, the predominant superpower in the region, continues to maintain an overwhelming influence.

Thus South Korea lies at the center of these three major powers, where their diverse interests intersect. In regard to the North Korea issue, because of South Korea's engagement policy toward the North, much of the tension on the Korean peninsula has been diminished in recent years. However, North Korea's excessive armed forces and its nuclear project are an undeniable reality and the main source of instability in the region.

At the same time, China has become so powerful that it also exerts considerable power over the region. As a member of the U.N. Security Council and an emerging economic and military power equipped with the nuclear capabilities, China is currently the largest communist state in the world.

And while relations between the United States and Japan are closer than ever before, Japan has long been deeply involved in historical and territorial disputes with both South Korea and China that threaten to interrupt its global leadership desires. Relations between the United States and South Korea are problematic mainly due to their different perspectives on the North Korean threat and the South Korean leadership's intention to adopt an increasingly independent foreign policy.<sup>52</sup>

Recently, South Korea's vehement request that the United States transfer operational authority to South Korea and the announcement of the balancer policy clearly reflected the public sentiment. And the Bush administration announced new U.S. military

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<sup>52</sup> Christopher Torchia, *Realignment tests U.S.-S. Korea alliance*, Boston Globe News : AP Associated Press, June 8, 2004.



strategies in Northeast Asia, which it refers to as “strategic flexibility.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, the number of U.S. forces stationed in South Korea is expected to be reduced in the near future. This created another security concern for South Korea, causing uncertainty about the U.S. commitment to South Korean security.

***b. The Northeast Asian Region as a Whole***

Northeast Asia remains a region in which armed conflict could break out at any moment. As mentioned above, there are several key issues that contribute to the regional instability: China’s threatening rise in power, Japan’s movement toward being a military superpower, and North Korea’s nuclear threat. In regard to this troubling situation, many worried voices have been raised about the United State’s security role and its commitment in the region.

Historically, the United States has played a pivotal role as a security safeguard in Northeast Asia. Indeed, the overall stability of the entire region has largely depended on the United State’s’ intention and ability to maintain all aspects of its regional presence successfully. The currently changing U.S. strategies toward the Northeast Asian region could therefore greatly affect and transform the region’s whole security environment in this new century.

**B. U.S. POST-COLD WAR STRATEGIES IN NORTHEAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE**

The United States continues to view Northeast Asia as a strategically important region. However, with its victory in the Cold War, the United States shifted its strategic focus from containment to the exertion of influence, thereby strengthening its status as the sole superpower. In the senior Bush administration, this policy was outlined in an East Asia Strategic Initiative (EASI).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> This new military strategy called the strategic flexibility reflects the intention of reducing the potential vulnerabilities of U.S. forces to enhance the capabilities to use the U.S. military power for new threats and unanticipated contingencies, See George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Washington D.C., February 2, 2005, accessed at ([www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html)), Last accessed July 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Adopted in 1990, the EASI further advanced the U.S. strategy of deterrence through the forward deployment of US forces, thereby defining the role of US presence in the region as an honest broker, a security balancer, and an ultimate security guarantor. See “A strategic framework for the Asian pacific rim report to the congress,” Washington, 1992, accessed at (<http://russia.shaps.hawaii.edu/security/report-92.html>), Last accessed August 2006.

It is generally agreed that the U.S. strategy has contributed to the peace and stability of the Northeast Asian region. But the tragedy of 9/11 became an event that caused a deep reconsideration of the reality of the United States' safety from outside attacks. The 9/11 events led to the United States' transformation of its strategic thinking and overall security plans. These changes were the result of a realization that its traditional deterrence strategy was not sufficient to cope with the newly emerging threats. Thus, when the United States reevaluated its security policy, it emphasized defense through preemptive action.<sup>55</sup>

Because the new emerging threats are harder to discern and deter, the United States has established an additional strategic option – the National Security Strategy. This strategy, published in September 2002, states that the United States is prepared to act preemptively, if necessary, depending on the situation. These recent strategic changes by the United States also have significant implications for the Northeast Asian security environment.

In that context, the U.S. alliance strategy became a U.S.-led strategy in the anti-terror movement. And eventually, the changing strategic concepts had a significant impact on U.S. relations with Northeast Asian countries. Nonetheless, there do not seem to be any big changes in the United States' perception that the Northeast Asian region is of key importance for U.S. strategies overall, even though other concerns like global terrorism and conflict are at present its dominant interest. The United States' relations with the countries in the Northeast Asian region influence both its strategic thinking and vice versa.

**a. *China Factor***

The United States maintains a “comprehensive engagement” strategy toward China, regarding China as both a current partner and a potential future threat to

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<sup>55</sup> Nowadays, considering the changing environment in which the threat becomes more diverse and unpredictable, with potential enemies becoming harder to discern and deter, the possible relationship between international terrorism and WMD is highlighted as the most dangerous threats to the security of the United States. See Kim won-soo, *New security strategy of the US and Northeast Asia*, Korean Foreign Ministry, May 5, 2003, accessed at (<http://www.ndu.edu/inss/symposia/pacific2003/kim.htm>), Last accessed September 2006.

U.S. supremacy.<sup>56</sup> Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, both China and the United States have silently competed to achieve a dominant influence in the Northeast Asian region.<sup>57</sup>

While the influence of the United States in Northeast Asia has apparently predominant, China's rapid growth both militarily and economically has become large enough by this point to worry the United States. In this situation, a major concern of the United States is how to cope with the potential threat to U.S. supremacy which China may pose in the near future.<sup>58</sup>

The East Asia Strategy Initiative, published in 1992, was the first document in which the United States characterized China as a "potential variable of instability" in Northeast Asia. The main reasons were that the country was gradually modernizing its military, that it was developing nuclear and missile technologies, and that there had long been the probability of a Chinese conflict with Taiwan.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the main reason the United States has moved its focus on security concerns from Europe to Northeast Asia is that the United States is aware and wary of the potential future threat posed by China.<sup>60</sup>

This wary U.S. attitude toward China became clear in 2000 when President Bush designated China as a strategic contender in the presidential election campaign. The United States perceives China's vigorous movement toward both political

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<sup>56</sup> Fisher, Richard D., "China's Threats to Taiwan Challenge U.S. leadership in Asia," Asian Studies Center: The Heritage Foundation, December 3, 1996, accessed at (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1997/Okazaki.htm>), Last accessed July 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Two countries have exerted dominant influence over the countries that fall under their influence of power and the Northeast Asian countries was under the influence of one of the two Great Powers depending on their own geopolitical advantages, See A. James Gregor, "China, the United States, and Security Policy in East Asia," *US Army War College Quarterly*, vol. xxvi, no. 2, Summer 1996, pp. 92-101, accessed at (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1997/Okazaki.htm>), Last accessed July 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Traditionally, the main goal of the United States in the Northeast Asian region has been to get rid of obstacles in this region when it wants to make political, economic and military advances, and to prevent resources from being transported into any particular country in the region to the extent that it can become an economic threat to the U.S. supremacy, See Zalmay Khalilzadetal, "The United States and Asia: Toward a New US Strategy and Force Posture," Santa Monica: RAND, 2001, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Department of Defense (DOD), *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Looking toward the 21st Century*, Washington D.C., July 1992.

<sup>60</sup> John J. Tkacik, Jr., "America's China Policy is in Urgent Need of Definition," Heritage Lecture: Heritage Foundation, April 19, 2005.

and military expansion as a significant variable among the obstacles to U.S. strategic interests in the Northeast Asian region. Therefore, the United States has concentrated its attention on dealing with Northeast Asia by efficiently coping with the potential threat from China, thereby guaranteeing stability in Northeast Asia.<sup>61</sup>

In this situation, it is highly probable that the U.S. deterrence strategy against China will also affect the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>62</sup> The United States has been watchful of the expansion of China's influence on the Korean Peninsula, calculating that its strong alliance with both South Korea and Japan are essential to deter potential threats and challenges from China under the guise of its maintenance of stability in Northeast Asia.<sup>63</sup>

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has been the strategic supporter of North Korea and has emerged as South Korea's largest export market, replacing the formerly number-one U.S. market. It has been more than fifty years since the ROK-U.S. alliance was established on the basis of the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) at the end of the Korean War. And during that time, South Korea has come to rely as much on China as it does on the United States for economy and security against North Korea and dissolution of the Cold War system. From South Korea's perspective, this development in its relations with China is becoming even more important because of the need for a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem. And, in that regard, the "China factor" will most likely be an influential variable for the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

#### ***b. Japan Factor***

Japan is one of the United States's most important allies in Northeast Asia. Especially considering the emerging power of China in the region, the alliance with Japan

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<sup>61</sup> In order for the United States to accomplish that, the report then argues that it should expand its military power further to Northeast Asia. The report suggests that the United States should prepare against China's expansion strategies, by utilizing Guam as the pivotal base in Asia so that its naval and air forces can swiftly operate in the South China Sea and the Southeast Asia region, deploy US troops to the Ryukyu Islands situated between Okinawa and Taiwan, and expand its base even further to Okinawa, the Philippines and Vietnam. For further information, See The RAND report published on May 15, 2001.

<sup>62</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, "The Future of the US-ROK Alliance: A Half Century and Beyond," Korea Research Institute for Strategy (KRIS), October 23, 2002, pp. 10–11.

<sup>63</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "The United States and East Asia: Working Together for a Secure Future," *The Journal of National Defense*, Vol.23 No.1, July 1995, pp. 43-52.

is the most efficient way to deter further Chinese expansion. Otherwise, China could become the main security concern of both Japan and the United States in the twenty-first century.

In light of these concerns, Japan yielded its own independent defense policy to form a new U.S.-Japan guideline in 1997, with strong U.S. support, which concluded with a redefinition that strengthened the U.S.-Japan alliance. As a main axis of the United States's strategies in Northeast Asia, the alliance between the United States and Japan is continuously updated and has become increasingly important.

In April 1996, the Japan-U.S. Alliance acquired a new international role. A Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security declared and verified new concepts for the defense of Japan and the Japan-U.S. alliance into the twenty-first century.<sup>64</sup> It re-stressed the important function of the Japan-U.S. alliance and stipulated its future direction both at home and abroad.<sup>65</sup> Since then, the alliance has been regarded as the most important axis in the United States's strategies in the Northeast Asian region.

Japan and the United States share about half of the world's GDP. But Japan is located geopolitically in Northeast Asia, where rivalry between regional powers is becoming increasingly competitive. From a U.S. strategic perspective, the alliance with Japan is considered strategically and economically indispensable for prosperity and peace in the Northeast Asian region. In sum, defending Japan and maintaining the stability of the surrounding region are regarded as important prerequisites to ensure a safe security environment in Northeast Asia.

Currently, the Japan-United States alliance is focused both on North Korea, as the foremost mid-term security issue, and on China as a long-term concern. Soon, the question that must be addressed will be: What should Japan and the United States do, within the context of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, to prepare for an emerging China?

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<sup>64</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, Washington D.C., February 1996.

<sup>65</sup> Defense Agency of Japan, *Defense of Japan 1996-The Response to the New Era*, Tokyo, August, 1996.

In this regard, we can expect that Japan and the United States will try to engage China in the interest of peace and prosperity in the region.<sup>66</sup> China, however, though it regards Japan and the United States as economic partners, tends to view the Japan-U.S. alliance as a potential future security threat. Given these tensions among the three countries, we suspect that China will be sensitive to any U.S. engagement policy and to Japan's ardent movement toward becoming a regional military power. Indeed, China may react negatively by trying to undermine the Japan-U.S. alliance.

As we have seen, the Japan factor must be considered as a significant aspect in determining the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance. In the current situation, the United States has emphasized enhancing its relationship with Japan as its first priority in the face of an emerging China. Thus, it would hardly welcome South Korea's merely adhering to a strong ROK-U.S. alliance without taking into consideration its relations with Japan in regard to the current conflicting issues. The United States seems to think that, if relations between South Korea and Japan improve and if the United States's relations with Japan and South Korea remain firm, the "virtual alliance" will eventually prosper and thereby accelerate the prospects for stability in Northeast Asia.<sup>67</sup>

However, if the future relations between South Korea and Japan are unfavorable, it could cause friction between South Korea and the United States. Ultimately, South Korea could even face a collision with the United States, whose national strategy and interests in Northeast Asia are based on the U.S.-Japan alliance and on Japan's involvement in the regional security agendas.

*c. The North Korea Factor*

The historic summit meeting held in June 2000 by South Korea and North Korea seemed to create a changed atmosphere in regard to the relations between the two countries. One of the most noticeable changes was in South Korea's overall perception of North Korea as its main enemy, which began to dissipate considerably among the people.

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<sup>66</sup> Kim Sung-han, "U.S. Security Policy Toward Northeast Asia," IFAN Review Vol. 10, No. 2, The Institute of Affairs and National Security, December, 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Ralph Cossa, "U.S.-Japan-Korea: Creating a Virtual Alliance," *PacNet*, no. 47, December 3, 1999, accessed at ([www.csis.org/pacfor/pac4799.pdf](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac4799.pdf)), Last accessed July 2006.

Confidence in the dissolution of the North Korean threat after the summit did not last long, however, as the North was not committed either to enhancing mutual trust or to reducing tension in their future relations.

After the Bush administration took office in January 2001, the United States and South Korea considered the question whether the threat from North Korea had really dissipated or not. President Bush stubbornly maintained a hard-line policy toward North Korea, even designating it as part of an “axis of evil.” This stance, as expressed in the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), implied, or at least suggested, that the United States viewed North Korea, in particular, its nuclear sites, as a possible target of a preemptive attack.<sup>68</sup>

The United States’s negative perception of North Korea clashed with the South Korea’s own perception of North Korea reflected in “Sunshine policy.” And, as a result, tension was generated between the United States and South Korea. However, when the North’s ceaseless plan to enrich uranium and develop nuclear weapons was disclosed in October 2002 and it succeeded in a nuclear test in 2006, it became very clear that the security threat from North Korea still existed.<sup>69</sup> North Korea’s nuclear brinkmanship, however irregularly conducted, shows that it presents a definite military threat.

While South Korea and the United States have different points of view on the specific ways to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, there now seems to be consensus at least on the fact that the threat still exists. Despite this shared perception, however, their different perspectives and approaches to resolving the North Korean nuclear threat may greatly affect the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

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<sup>68</sup> Department of Defense, Nuclear Posture Review, U.S. Congress, December 31, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> The North Korean nuclear test was the detonation of a nuclear device conducted on October 9, 2006 by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. North Korea announced its intention to conduct a test on October 3, six days prior. A nuclear test by North Korea would pose an “unacceptable threat” to peace and stability in the world and would further isolate the North Korea. See “N. Korea to conduct ‘safe’ nuclear test,” *Science Daily*, October 3, 2006, accessed at (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/upi/index.php?feed=TopNews&article=UPI-1-20061003-06414000-bc-norkor-nuclear.xml>), Last accessed August 2006.

### **C. U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE STRATEGIES AND THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE AFTER THE COLD WAR**

During the Cold War period, it was their mutual interests that formed the basis of the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>70</sup> Both countries maintained the strong military alliance because of their shared interest in deterring both North Korea's aggression and the Soviet Union's expansion. The ROK-U.S. alliance, along with the Japan-U.S. alliance, played an important role in the United States's strategic plans in Northeast Asia. In the 1960s, the United States, as part of its new Northeast Asian strategy, attempted to incorporate South Korea and Japan into a single alliance.<sup>71</sup> The attempt was unsuccessful, however, due to South Korea's deep mistrust of and reluctance to cooperate with Japan. Nonetheless, the United States has continued to expedite its plan to combine the two alliances.<sup>72</sup> The U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security in April 1996 and the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation on September 23, 1997, were initial steps toward a Northeast Asian version of a regional alliance.<sup>73</sup>

#### **1. Historical Background**

The Taep'o-dong missile test by North Korea in August 1998 functioned as a catalyst, inciting South Korea, the United States, and Japan to begin strategic discussions. One of the outcomes was the Perry Report, which focused on joint measures that the countries could implement to cope with North Korean missile threat. Another result was the formation of the Trilateral Coordination & Oversight Group (TCOG).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hans J. Morganthau (Ed.), "Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace," New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc, 1985, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> Herbert P. Bix, "Regional Integration: Japan and South Korea in America's Asian Policy," *BCAS*, Vol. 5, No. 3, November 1973, pp. 21–30.

<sup>72</sup> This idea is a duplication of "unified regional strategies" in the 1960s that aimed for a Northeast Asia alliance by including South Korea and Taiwan (informal) in the U.S.-Japan alliance, See Park Sang-seek, "Korea-U.S.-Japan southern alliance," *Korea Herald*, April 4, 2005, accessed at (<https://www.benadorassociates.com/article/13532>), Last accessed September 2006.

<sup>73</sup> INSS Special Report, *The US and Japan: Advancing toward a Mature Partnership*, Washington DC: INSS, October. 11, 2000.

<sup>74</sup> For further information, See Dr. William J. Perry, Special Advisor to the President and the Secretary of State, "The Perry Report: Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations," October 12, 1999, accessed at ([http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/991012\\_northkorea\\_rpt.html](http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/991012_northkorea_rpt.html)), Last accessed September 2006.



Though limited in scope and still in an early stage of development, the TCOG is significant primarily because it is a regional alliance. And though it was fundamentally formulated because of the North Korean threat, it was intended to affect the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance as well.<sup>75</sup>

It would be overly hasty, however, to consider the development of an ROK-U.S.-Japan relationship more deeply; doing so might be regarded as an attempt to build a regional alliance that was intended to oppose other regional powers, such as China, for example.

## **2. ROK-U.S. Alliance: The Future**

It is no exaggeration to say that the alliance between South Korea and the United States has been guided and formed in keeping with by the United States's strategic concerns and interests. And, largely because of this, it is still in the process of transformation.

However, many foreign policy experts on both sides believe that it is now time for the ROK-U.S. alliance to be reviewed and reevaluated, so that plans can be developed for achieving a more advanced relationship for the future. Any preparatory process for determining the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance should be based on an objective reevaluation of all the issues involving the other major region players, North Korea, China, and Japan, and the United States's changing strategic interests. And the process must lead to a maximization, that is, peace and order throughout the region: on the Korean peninsula and the entirety of Northeast Asia. In addition, the alliance between South Korea and the United States must become more relevant and flexible if it is to face successfully the new twenty-first-century challenges. And, most important, the alliance must be based on a convergence of interests.

## **D. THE ANTICIPATED IMPACT OF THE BALANCER POLICY ON U.S. FOREIGN STRATEGIES TOWARD THE NEA AND THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE**

As we have shown, the environmental security factors that affect the United States's strategic concerns in Northeast Asia are becoming increasingly diverse. China is now an influential variable in Northeast Asia and the main potential future threat to the

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<sup>75</sup> William J. Perry, "Review of United States Policy toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations," Department of Defense, Washington, D.C., October 12, 1999.

United States. North Korea has declared itself as a country possessing a nuclear capability, to be used if needed, by successfully conducting a nuclear test. Meanwhile, Japan is trying to expand its security role in the region, with strong support from the United States. Within this context, it is not difficult to expect that China and North Korea will present distinct military challenges and potential threats for the United States to deal with now and in the future. China has even attempted to weaken South Korea's relationships with Japan and the United States and to limit the role of the United States in the region.

Furthermore, North Korea now possesses a nuclear weapons capability, which could be used now or in the near future, if necessary, against any target. This possibility was made much more manifest by North Korea's successful nuclear test in 2006, even though it was a small test in terms of its power and scale.

### **1. Japan's Role**

Given this unstable situation, it seems that Japan's security role in the Northeast Asia may become the most important concern and interest in the United States' security policy planning. Japan has been gradually increasing its military expenditures to upgrade its military power and make it strong enough to be used as an effective foreign policy method at the proper time. China and South Korea, as Japan's neighbors, are currently uneasy about its growing military strength. In contrast, the United States seems to be much more interested in encouraging a greater Japanese security role in the region. Not surprisingly, the U.S. move to encourage Japan's security role in the Northeast Asia has had negative, unpleasant affect on South Korean perceptions of the United States and its motives. This and several other issues have triggered anti-America sentiment among the populace and revealed the necessity for fundamental alterations in ROK-U.S. relations.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the ROK-U.S. policy coordination on the North Korean nuclear issue hit a new low in early 2005 in the aftermath of North Korea's successful strategy to undercut the six party talks, the contrasting passive Bush Administration strategy, and South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun's pointed criticisms of the United States and expressions of sympathy for key North Korean positions, See Larry A. Niksch, "U.S. Security Policies in the Western Pacific," The U.S. Pacific Command, and the Asia Pacific Center for Security, 2005.

Since North Korea's successful nuclear test, South Korea and the United States seem to be entering a post-six-party-talk period.<sup>77</sup> However, unless the wide gap between their diverse perspectives can be narrowed soon, both countries' attitudes and policies toward North Korea are likely to diverge even further.

Given these circumstances, South Korea's announcement that it intends to act as a balancer among the regional powers in Northeast Asia has raised the suspicion that South Korea and the United States no longer share the basic strategic objectives that are indispensable for maintaining and developing the alliance in the future.<sup>78</sup>

## **2. China's Role**

For China to focus its effort on national reconstruction, it needs a stable environment on its periphery. The security and stability of the Korean peninsula, therefore, is a significant factor affecting the Chinese security environment.

In this regard, one of the China's main interests in Northeast Asia is keeping both North and South Korea under its influence and maintaining that close relationship.<sup>79</sup> The Chinese pay special attention to the Korean peninsula because of its geopolitical importance. Accordingly, China's policy toward South Korea under the influence of the United States has been inflexible.

## **3. The U.S. Role**

In this context, China will probably welcome South Korea's intention to implement a balancer policy because that will assist China in strengthening its status as a military and economic power in Northeast Asia. Thus, the balancer policy, though it could serve China's goals and intentions, may be regarded by the United States, depending on the overall situation, as an attempt by South Korea to move closer to China.

An even more fundamental and serious possibility is that the balancer concept could harden into a new South Korean doctrine in case of contingencies involving the

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<sup>77</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "U.S. Security Policies in the Western Pacific," The U.S. Pacific Command, and the Asia Pacific Center for Security, 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Mark E. Manyin, "South Korean Politics and Rising Anti-Americanism: Implication for U.S. Policy toward North Korea," Foreign Affairs Division, May 6, 2003. pp. 9, 11.

<sup>79</sup> David M. Finkelstein, "China's New Security Concept: Reading between the Lines," *Washington Journal of Modern China*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1999, pp. 37-49.

United States, China, and Japan. If this should occur, the United States would have to judge carefully the importance of security on the Korean peninsula to U.S. interests. It would also have to consider whether to continue the alliance if the benefits of the alliance to the United States outside the peninsula become minimal.<sup>80</sup> The United States may have to reach a fundamental decision about whether the United States' interest in the future stability of South Korea's relations with the major powers is sufficient to justify a continuation of the alliance with South Korea, even if the alliance provides few benefits to the United States outside the Korean peninsula.

There is also a possibility that the United States would decide to move in a different strategic direction altogether. If it decided to launch a containment policy against China, for instance, or to enforce regime change in North Korea, while encouraging Japan to emerge as a military power, this would presumably result in a serious fracture in the stability of the Northeast Asian region. And if the United States should pursue a regional order characterized by confrontation and division, the ROK-U.S. alliance would be drawn into a relationship faced with serious contradictions.

The overall effect of South Korea's balancer policy will depend on the strategic choices that South Korea makes in the future. The idea that the entire interrelational structure of the Northeast Asian countries will be changed *sounds* good, but in terms of actual international relations, it may be virtually meaningless. In truth, South Korea has neither sufficient economic nor military power to function as a balancer and shape and affect the outcome of relations between regional powers. The government's suggestion of a balancer role for South Korea may be merely a grand vision of South Korea's future potential. However, practically speaking, given South Korea's inherent animosity toward Japan, its negative reaction to the Dokdo issue, and its developing relations with China, it is doubtful whether South Korea could mediate the rivalry between China and Japan.

In addition, South Korea's rising antipathy over the Dokdo issue with Japan does not support the view that South Korea can play a balancer role. South Korea also

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<sup>80</sup> In the United States, conservative opinion leaders have contributed to this viewpoint by claiming that U.S. troops need not remain in Korea if they are unwanted. See William Safire, "N. Korea: China's Child," *New York Times*, December 26, 2004; Doug Bandow, "Bring the Troops Home: Ending the Obsolete Korean Commitment," *Policy Analysis* no. 474 (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, May 2003), accessed at ([www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa474.pdf](http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa474.pdf)), Last accessed July 2006; Robert Novak, "Perhaps It's Time South Korea Tried Its Wings," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2003.

continues to have issues with China over borders.<sup>81</sup> But those could lead to a situation in which China would use the Dokdo issue as a means to separate South Korea from Japan and away from the United States, and closer to China.

Considered theoretically and realistically, then, South Korea seems far less likely to encourage stability than to generate instability, quite opposite to its intention to implement a balancer policy in Northeast Asia. Furthermore, continuing to promote the balancer policy would most likely drive the ROK-U.S. alliance into a most difficult situation, perhaps beyond recovery.

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<sup>81</sup> Gando Convention is the 1905 agreement between Japan and China that set the border between China and Korea. Raising border issues is no usual way to encourage stability. Rather the opposite. Controversies about the legal validity of the Gando convention is still in the process, See Ryu Jin, "Seoul Says Gando Convention is invalid," *Korea Times*, October 22, 2004, accessed at (<http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/200410/kt2004102221520310230.htm>), Last accessed October 2006.

## **IV. TOWARD A MATURE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE**

In Chapters II and III, we approached the viability of the South Korean balancer policy theoretically (i.e., in terms of the traditional concept in international relations theory) and practically (i.e., in terms of the ROK-U.S. alliance). According to the synthetic analysis in those chapters, South Korea's balancer policy does not seem to be a viable national strategy. More important, in practical terms, the balancer policy has a high possibility of conflicting with the changing strategic interests of the United States. As we have noted before, if any South Korean foreign policy conflicts with or contradicts U.S. foreign policy interests, it would be hard to expect the strong relationship between the two countries to continue.

In regard to that central issue, this chapter will presents out recommendations for future relations within the ROK-U.S. alliance. In sections A and B, we will discuss the importance of and necessity for reviewing and reevaluation the ROK-U.S. alliance. Section C will outline an optimal foreign-policy option by which South Korea could further develop its alliance with the United States. In that discussion, we emphasize the reasons that a strong alliance with the United States should continue to be the foundation of South Korea's foreign policy and suggest desirable directions that the alliance should move in future ROK-U.S. relations.

### **A. IMPORTANCE OF THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE: PAST AND PRESENT SUCCESSES**

It is no exaggeration to say that, in terms of security achievements and interoperability objectives serving both nations' strategic interests, the alliance between the ROK and the United States has been a most successful alliance. Formed in 1953, after three years of war in Korea, the alliance functioned as a catalyst and a breakthrough for South Korea. Under the strong security umbrella of the United States, South Korea saw an amazing leap in its economic and political development in a very short time. The alliance helped South Korea develop the social environment and infrastructures in which

such values as democracy, human rights, and a free-market economy could take root. Indeed, the ROK-U.S. alliance contributed to the establishment of a strong base for this enormous achievement by South Korea.

Through South Korea and the United States's joint efforts, the alliance has evolved into a well-organized organization that shares common strategic values based on their mutual security interests. These things were made possible, especially, by the ROK-U.S. military alliance.<sup>82</sup> Truly, the ROK-U.S. alliance has served well the nations' endeavors, not only South Korea's but also for the United States's.

However, even successful alliances cannot avoid the new emerging challenges.<sup>83</sup> Nowadays, a certain mistrust and concern has arisen in regard to the future of the alliance between South Korea and the United States. And the resulting tension has triggered a necessity for a reevaluation and redefinition of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

#### **B. NECESSITY OF REDEFINING THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE**

It has been more than fifty years since the ROK-U.S. alliance was formed by the mutual signing of the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).<sup>84</sup> During the past half-century, the alliance has played a vital role in deterring the security threat from North Korea. But the contributions of the ROK-U.S. alliance have not been limited to the Korean peninsula. More broadly, the alliance prevented the possibility of a serious competition between regional powers such as China and Japan for hegemony in Northeast Asia. Truly, the alliance between South Korea and the United States in many ways has contributed to fostering a peaceful environment in that strategic area.

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<sup>82</sup> Alliances serve the purpose not just of providing for one's security, but doing so in an efficient and relatively less costly manner than would otherwise be the case, i.e., self-help. In this vein, an alliance's success is measured by the extent to which it serves as a facilitator of power accretion and projection; operates as a unified command; enables common tactics and doctrine through joint training; promotes a division of security roles; facilitates cooperation in production and development of military equipment, and elicits political support among domestic constituencies. See Dr. William Perry, "Comprehensive Commenting Remarks," Alliance Tomorrow Workshop Proceedings, GFRS, December 6, 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Kim Dong-shin, "The ROK-U.S. Alliance: Where Is It Headed?," Strategic Forum, no. 197, April 2003.

<sup>84</sup> After the Korean War, in 1954, the Mutual Defense Treaty was signed. The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the ROK, which is the basis of the alliance that authorizes the existence of the USFK, stipulates that the two nations "desired to strengthen their efforts for collective defense for the preservation of peace and security pending the development of a more comprehensive and effective system of regional security in the Pacific area." See "Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea," Avalon Project at Yale Law School, October 1, 1953, accessed at (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/korea/kor001.htm>), Last accessed September 2006.

However, the alliance has not operated free of problems. In most cases, the United States has, unilaterally, exerted a major influence on changes in the alliance. South Korea has had to accept these U.S.-led strategic changes because there it had no other option at the time. This situation was more or less inevitable considering that, while the communist threat from North Korea and the Soviet Union continued to exist, the security umbrella supplied by the United States was South Korea's most important priority. Indeed, it was vital to South Korea's survival. Thus, during the Cold War era, deterring the expansion of communism remained the two countries' main mutual interest and justification for the existence of the alliance.

In the new circumstances after the Soviet Union collapsed, however, there was no distinct enemy to challenge U.S. supremacy. And the Cold War logic that had supported the alliance proved too weak to support or justify its continued existence. The ROK-U.S. alliance formed in the Cold War, therefore, had to be reviewed in keeping with the changing strategic environment in Northeast Asia. There is a consensus that it is necessary to reformulate the rationale for the ROK-U.S. alliance.

After the Cold War ended, there were several suggestions about how the alliance should proceed.<sup>85</sup> But while the suggestions differed somewhat in their logic, concepts, and methods, there was a consensus that whatever the strategic format it might be, it should continue to maintain the overall strength of the ROK-U.S. alliance. All agreed that a format was not even worth discussing if it did not favor strengthening South Korea's alliance with the United States.

Due to the concurrence of such important events as the South-North summit in June 2000, the Bush administration's inauguration in 2001, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and

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<sup>85</sup> After the Cold War, there are three major directions in which the alliance should proceed. The first path is to redefine the existing alliance under a new vision after the dissolution of the North Korean threat. The second path is to seek a new alliance. The third path is to achieve a self-sufficient national defense through an independent military build-up. The second path is not viable because South Korea still harbors antagonism toward Japan and lack of trust in China. The third path is also not realistic in the sense that although it is viable to ensure a self-sufficient national defense to some degree, it is not possible to aim to have a completely independent national defense, since the military build-up will inevitably lead to an arms race among neighboring nations. Therefore, the first path is desirable in that it chooses to "maintain the existing ROK-U.S. alliance," rather than to opt for isolation when there are insufficient alternatives. See Seong Ryoul Cho, "Redefining Korea-US Alliance in Changing Strategic Environments on Korean Peninsula," *Unification Policy Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2002, pp. 113-122.



the intermittent North Korean nuclear threat, the necessity for reviewing the ROK-U.S. alliance has become even more emphatic. At present, the greatest drawback to the process is that there is no consensus on an appropriate direction for the alliance.

In light of these factors, it is understandable that there are different points of view and opinions on the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance. And it is difficult to decide which factors should be taken into consideration and made a priority. In this respect, it is important and necessary to find efficient ways to present a desirable direction for the future ROK-U.S. alliance.

### **C. TOWARD A MATURE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE**

Currently, the ROK-U.S. alliance faces many challenges both from within and from outside the country. North Korea, which secretly supports terrorist activities, is exerting its full efforts to expedite its nuclear development, destabilizing the security environment of all of Northeast Asia. China's rise as a superpower also evidences all the symptoms of the huge change in the systemic order of the region.

Nowadays, because of the currently emerging anti-Americanism in South Korea, the unequal status of the alliance and the conciliatory mood between South and North Korea, the logic that justified the ROK-U.S. alliance has dissipated.<sup>86</sup>

In this unstable situation, to protect its own national interests and security, it is imperative that South Korea continue to support a strong ROK-U.S. alliance. However, it is neither necessary nor desirable that South Korea continue to adhere to the alliance logic formed in the Cold War era. If there is no flexibility or proper timing involved in meeting the changes of the times, the alliance may not be able to avoid a crisis.

The ROK-U.S. alliance must learn how to cope with the new security situations that have arisen since the end of the Cold War if it is to become more than the simple

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<sup>86</sup> Kim Byung-kook, "The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Anti-American Challenge," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 3, No. 2, 2003, pp. 240–41. On the historical development of anti-Americanism in South Korea, see David Steinberg (Ed.), *Korean Attitudes toward the United States: Changing Dynamics* (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2005); Lew Young Ick, "Historical Overview of Korean Perceptions of the United States: Five Major Stereotypes," *Korea Journal* 44, no. 1 (2004): 109–51; Kim Jin-wung, "Recent Anti-Americanism in South Korea," *Asian Survey* 29, no. 3 (1989): 749–63; Shin Gi-wook, "South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective" *Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (1996): 787–903; Lee Sook-jong, "Sources of Anti-Americanism in Korean Society: Implications for Korea-U.S. Relations," in *Korea-U.S. Relations in Transition*, ed. Baek Jong-chun and Lee Sang-hyun (Sungnam: Sejong Institute, 2002).

military alliance it was in the past. The alliance must also form a more advanced relationship with the United States if it is to help forging a new type of alliance suitable to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

In transforming the alliance, merely small and superficial changes to its structure or functions will not bear much fruit. Instead, transformation requires a greater understanding of the two allies' common values and a common strategic vision for the future.

So far, the alliance has not had a common strategic vision. The main objective shared by both countries was to deter the expansion of communism. However, it is no longer possible to just adhere to a Cold War-style approach if the alliance is to cope effectively with the emerging threats and challenges.

The ROK-U.S. alliance, which has contributed so much to the consolidation of democratic values and the higher international status of South Korea, now needs to expand its common agenda. In addition to its focus on a military agenda, it must be transformed into a balanced, comprehensive alliance that includes cooperation in non-military fields. This transformation will not be possible unless it is based on a strong foundation of common values such as democracy, common threat perceptions and understanding and acknowledging the authority of each country.

Only through these common values, can new goals and a new vision for the ROK-U.S. alliance be established in due course and a more symmetrical relationship between the United States and South Korea be realized. In addition, by looking beyond the South Korean peninsula, the ROK-U.S. alliance could develop into a partnership for regional security.

We believe it is true, as others have claimed, that, until now, the alliance has been overly focused on a single issue, North Korea, which was regarded as an imminent threat to both countries. For the alliance to develop more diverse relations in the future, both the United States and South Korea must develop a broader focus that promotes regional interests. This does not mean that, as long as the North Korean threat exists, the alliance's traditional role to deter North Korea should be ignored. However, from the perspective of its long-term national strategies, the alliance should also pay attention to regional security

cooperation in order to cope with diverse global issues such as racial and regional conflicts, international terrorism, and so on. When South Korea tries to heed these issues, it must form common strategies with the United States, especially in light of the United States's current international security policy, whose underlying values are becoming the main strategic interest of the United States.

Furthermore, the development of close security cooperation between the United States and South Korea needs to be carried out carefully, paying attention to the reactions and opinions of the neighboring countries. This is because such a development could cause antipathy and concern for South Korea's neighbors. But for the ROK-U.S. alliance to develop into a more regional alliance, both countries must also try to develop better relations with other regional organizations, playing a positive role in regard to regional issues through dialogue and cooperation.

Finally, to reorganize the ROK-U.S. alliance into a more symmetrical and flexible relationship and to play a role in securing regional stability, the current, mostly unilateral U.S.-led combined command system with the structure of Combined Forces Command (CFC) must be changed to a more equitable command system.<sup>87</sup> Ideally, an entirely parallel, combined command system is most desirable. However, no one expects an entirely parallel, combined command system to be established as long as the North Korean threat remains what it is today.

Nonetheless, it would be beneficial, we believe, to expedite the development of a new, combined command system more suitable to the Korean environment. The envisioned system would consist of a ROK-led combined command system, so as to guarantee Korea's sovereignty. However, even if the system is transformed into an ROK-led system, it must be well-organized so that it can respond rapidly at any given moment to cope with newly emerging threats. In other words, transformation of the combined system should not mean making fundamental changes in South Korea's relations with the United States. In any case, it would be extremely difficult for South Korea to overcome

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<sup>87</sup> The CFC is commanded by a US general officer that who reports to the National Command Authorities of both countries. CFC's military power resides collectively in the ROK Armed Forces, US Forces in Korea, and US augmentation from the Pacific and the United States, See USFK, "U.S. Forces, Korea / Combined Forces Command," Military: Global Security Online, June 2, 2006, accessed at (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/usfk.htm>), Last accessed October 2006.

its inferiority in terms of its national power in a short time. In this regard, any transformation process should proceed gradually, with a long-term plan, by strengthening South Korea's combined-forces posture with the United States.

Practically speaking, given the new U.S. security strategy and the current unpleasant atmosphere that exists between the two countries, it will take some time to draw up a roadmap determining the direction for the future ROK-U.S. alliance. In the process of transformation, a seemingly inevitable clash between the two countries could occur. Both countries must try to develop their relations further, with an open mind and a constructive dialog, to overcome any temporary obstacles. If they do these things, it should not take long for the ROK-U.S. alliance to develop into a more mature and flexible alliance. Those involved must bear in mind that the fruit that will result from this cooperative effort will more than overcome the cost paid in the process of improvement.

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## V. CONCLUSION

As we have shown, when viewed from the perspective of the ROK-U.S. alliance, the balancer policy announced by the government does not seem to be an appropriate foreign policy for South Korea. It may be the result of a hasty foreign-policy decision-making process that failed to fully consider various factors of the security environment in Northeast Asia, especially the United States's changing strategies. If South Korea continues to adhere to the balancer policy, it may further undermine the ROK-U.S. alliance, which already shows symptoms of cleavage. Whatever policy option South Korea adopts, it should focus on strengthening and developing its relationship with the United States.

The ROK-U.S. alliance, which has been regarded as a successful bilateral alliance for more than fifty years, now faces many new challenges, which require reviewing some of the alliance's current characteristics. It is clear that the Cold War logic that justified the existence of the ROK-U.S. alliance in the past is not applicable in the current security environment.

The instability of this environment derives primarily from the on-going competition between various regional powers and the United States's changing strategies in regard to Northeast Asia. These will have an increasing impact on the future direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance. And if the alliance is not well prepared to cope with these new challenges by sharing a common strategic vision and objectives, both countries will be unable to find any justification for the alliance's continued.

In this regard, any process for developing the alliance should be based on a mutual understanding of both nations' interest in developing a mature relationship that can cope efficiently with the new challenges. However, there should not be a fundamental change that could undercut the foundation of the alliance. The process toward a stronger future alliance should be conducted gradually with a sincere and open dialog between the two countries. The current friction that exists between the United States and South Korea must be better understood and dealt with as a minor obstacle, such as may typically arise in any process for the improvement of the alliance.

There is no need to be overly concerned about or exaggerate such minor frictions, as doing so will only undermine the fundamental relationship between the two countries.

During the last fifty years, as the times changed, the ROK-U.S. alliance was able to accomplish its role successfully due to its well-organized institutional foundations.<sup>88</sup> However, a future alliance between South Korea and the United States must be reorganized and reequipped to accommodate new emerging challenges.

The nuclear threat from North Korea will continue to be an imminent issue for both countries. However, some South Koreans do not take the North Korean issue seriously enough; they tend to regard the North not as an enemy but as a counterpart for peaceful coexistence. It is true that the North is an entity with whom the South must reconcile and cooperate for a peaceful environment and eventual national reunification. However, South Korea must first understand and realize that, as long as North Korea does not give up its desire to develop nuclear capabilities, to expand its military capability, which is destabilizing all of Northeast Asia, it will continue to be the South's main enemy. The challenge for the ROK-U.S. alliance is to find the necessary, more refined, strategies to reduce the military tension with North Korea.<sup>89</sup>

As for the China factor, while the United States regards China as a potential future threat, South Korea regards China as an important future partner in Northeast Asia. Considering the current changing atmosphere, in which South Korea and China are developing a closer relationship than in the past, the future could bring a clash, or, at best, more friction between the United States and South Korea over their differing China policies.<sup>90</sup>

As for the Japan factor, though the United States continues to regard Japan as the main axis of its alliance in Northeast Asia and tries to involve South Korea in the broad framework of an ROK-Japan-U.S. integration, South Korea remains reluctant to move

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<sup>88</sup> The ROK-U.S. alliance has been a hard and strong alliance based on a firm institutional foundation like a mutual defense treaty, a combined forces command, regularized military maneuvers, defense cost-sharing, and a efficient inter-operability and standardization, etc.

<sup>89</sup> Dan Blumenthal, "Facing a Nuclear North Korea and the Future of U.S.-ROK Relations," Institute for Corean-American Studies, Inc., October 11, 2005, accessed at (<http://www.icasinc.org/2005fdxb.html>), Last accessed November 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Choong Nam Kim, "Changing Korean perceptions of the Post-Cold War Era and the U.S.-ROK alliance" *The East-West Center No.67*, April 2003, p. 5.

closer to Japan because of their unresolved and controversial historical issues. Nonetheless, for South Korea to develop its relationship with the United States, it must smooth its relations with Japan by resolving those conflicting issues.

The social and political environment in both the United States and South Korea is also an important factor to be considered in reevaluating the alliance. As the reconciliatory atmosphere in its relations with North Korea grows in South Korea, criticism of the alliance has arisen in some corners of South Korean society and has resulted in a lessening of its social and political support for the alliance. However, as mentioned above, we must bear in mind that such a seemingly impromptu atmosphere of reconciliation between the two Koreas cannot guarantee the eventual security environment of South Korea; furthermore, it should not affect South Korea's strong alliance with the United States.

However, since 9/11, the United States has also evidenced a change in its political and social support for the alliance. Its changing strategies were reflected, in particular, in the United States's recent military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, which demonstrated a new U.S. concept of military transformation based on strategic flexibility. This is especially likely to weaken U.S. support for the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>91</sup> If the two countries fail to reach an agreement for the development of the alliance, there is no telling which direction the alliance will go in the future. If the United States and South Korea cannot narrow the gap between their strategic concerns and interests, the development of future relations will also be difficult to predict. Both countries must exert every possible effort to reach a compromise based on common strategic values and open dialog with a clear understanding of the overall strategic landscape in Northeast Asia.

As for South Korea, realigning itself as a balancer and moving closer to other regional powers depending on the situation is not a desirable policy option. And it may only increase the deterioration of its relationship with the United States.

For South Korea, the most desirable policy option is to continue to develop a strong alliance with the United States. In the future, the nature of the relationship between South Korea and the United States will depend on their ability to compromise on

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<sup>91</sup> Lee Chul-kee, "Strategic flexibility of U.S. forces in Korea", Nautilus Institute, March 9, 2006.



conflicting matters presented above. Given the present situation and viewed from the perspective of the ROK-U.S. alliance, we believe that a balancer policy is not an appropriate or viable foreign policy for South Korea. And, if it were adopted, there is a high possibility that it might even function as a catalyst to undermine and weaken the foundation of the ROK-U.S. alliance, which is already having problems.

Even if an alliance functions in a way that fulfills both, or all, the member countries' national interests, those interests will not always be mutual. Alliances will not operate smoothly all the time. However, any discrepancies must be overcome for the alliance to develop and mature. And compromise requires a refined diplomacy based on mutual understanding and trust. Once the member nations, in our case, South Korea and the United States, achieve understanding, they will be able to forge a detailed strategy for dealing with new emerging threats. This must be South Korea and the United States's primary goal, so that the ROK-U.S. alliance can achieve peace in Northeast Asia.

The day when South Korea and the United States succeed in narrowing the gap between their views of what the central concerns and strategic interests are will be the day that they successfully transcend the currently rising challenges. They will then be able to deal effectively with those challenges, just as they have so far. South Korea and the United States must make a continuous effort both to enhance the values and interests they share and to cope with the regional security issues. Doing so successfully will, in turn, reconfirm the strength and vitality of their longtime partnership.

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